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# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SILENCE

*and other Sermons*

BY

LESLIE D. WEATHERHEAD, M.A.

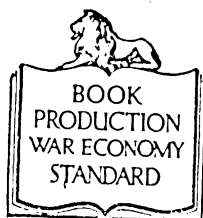
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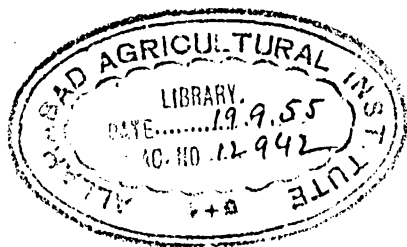
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DEDICATED TO  
THE REVEREND WILLIAM L. NORTHRIDGE  
M.A., B.D., M.Th., Ph.D.

President of the Methodist Church in Ireland  
Principal of Edgehill Methodist Theological College, Belfast

but to me  
BILLY  
MY FRIEND





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## PREFACE

I HAVE written rather a lengthy Preface in order that those who read this volume of sermons may have, if they so desire, the background of the work of which preaching is only a part, and a picture of the people to whom these messages were proclaimed.

In the spring of 1941 the City Temple was set on fire by incendiary bombs dropped from German aeroplanes, and, except for the façade, the tower, and the lower part of the walls, totally destroyed. The famous marble pulpit, gift to my predecessor, Joseph Parker, from the City of London, was an unrecognizable heap of stones. Not one of the stained-glass windows remained. The great organ vanished in a night. The vast auditorium, seating over two thousand people, was a jumble of burnt beams, twisted girders, and broken rubble. A score of firemen lived on the premises from the outbreak of war, but, unfortunately, the first fireman on the roof fell and was injured. By the time he was carried to safety the roof was alight in three places. Pieces of burning roof fell on to the wooden pews and in a few minutes the place was a roaring inferno.

I was on the spot before the fire was wholly extinguished and, led by Captain F. W. Ashard, M.C., our gallant verger, I crawled in through a back way, but a pile of red-hot rubble and still-burning material blocked our advance. With some difficulty and circumvention, we got right through to the front entrance. The gates opening on to Holborn Viaduct were closed. I saw a slim figure standing on the pavement looking through the great iron gates. She did not see me. For a few seconds I watched her. She would account herself a person of no importance, standing there in the rain. But it was not the rain that made her face wet. She was crying—not hysterically or convulsively. Just crying quietly there in the rain over the ruins of the church she loved: the church where she had met God. I pushed one of the great gates open and brought her in. We surveyed the destruction in silence and then

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we espied the marble figure of Joseph Parker, thrown from its pedestal, but still erect, with that proud, majestic, serene, strong face, scorched by the flame and chipped by the blast of bombs, but still challenging evil to do its worst. . . . The tears of a simple-hearted girl. . . . The triumphant expression of the old warrior. . . . They seemed to express one's innermost feelings. On the one hand, the sadness, the unutterable sadness of our loss. On the other, the unconquerable sense of triumph; a great thankfulness that no power of hate or aggression or evil can ever dominate the Church, the living entity, made, not of stones, however venerable, or stained glass, however lovely, but of loyal, loving human hearts.

I have come to admire those stout hearts. My people, be it remembered, do not live near where the City Temple stood. We have long been the only English Free Church which is technically within the City boundaries. And we could not continue to exist unless people came long distances to worship with us and support our witness. My 'parish' extends from Barking in the east of London to Barnes in the west; from Barnet in the north to Banstead in the south; more than twenty miles in every direction from the City Temple. Yes, and far beyond. For we used to boast seat-holders in Liverpool and Southampton, in Birmingham and Harrogate, who regularly attended on Sundays.

And what a variety of people is contained in any one congregation! Our membership includes a Cabinet Minister, and others of rank, position and authority, and also the lowliest and poorest; people who have been unemployed, people who have been in prison. I have seen in one service folk who can put a coronet on their note-paper, a score who can put letters of distinction before or after their names, and also hundreds who do not earn more than a pound or two a week. Harley Street doctors, an Under-Secretary of State, professors and lawyers, students and eminent men of commerce worship with artisans, youngsters just beginning a career, nurses, clerks, typists, young business men and women, postmen and policemen. In the days of peace, when, unable to accommodate the congregation, we relayed both services to a crowded hall below the Church, we have counted fourteen nation-

alities at one service. The City Temple has been called 'The Cathedral of Nonconformity'. The dear old walls have embraced men and women of every nation and almost every sect under heaven. Those walls have listened to men's joyous thanksgivings, their pleas for pardon, the stifled sob of the over-burdened, the resolute dedications of youth, the crying of the broken-hearted, the hopeful aspirations of the young and the faith of the aged. Those gaunt, ruined walls, scarred now by bombs, blackened with smoke, open to the wind and rain, what a story they could tell since the days when they were first dedicated to the public worship of Almighty God!

Come with me on an afternoon's visiting! I must go first to a hospital, since an urgent message calls me there. My wife is with me. She drives the little car and plans to sit in it while she waits for me. But shrapnel is falling and she is obliged to lock it and leave it and take shelter under the stone porch of a nearby church. In the darkened hospital the windows are nearly all boarded up against the flying glass which, in an air raid, can cause horrible mutilation and is the chief cause of casualty. The corridors are now illumined only by low-power blue bulbs. I find my way to a ward. One of my members is behind the screens. I sit on her bed and she stretches out her left hand to greet me. How often we have said, 'I would give my right hand if . . .' Well, that is what she has done! She is a worker at a warden's post. 'Air Raid Precautions.' 'Civil Defence.' How ordinary the words sound! But, the night before, Doris was on duty at a certain street shelter at eight o'clock at night. It was quite dark. An air raid was in progress. The guns were booming. Shrapnel was falling. Should she stop and take cover? She decided that she *must* reach the post at the time appointed and relieve another. So on she went. Her right arm was completely blown off. . . . The Mayor of her borough came to the hospital to congratulate her. He might well do so. One lost arm may sound a little in the grim fight for freedom in which millions have been made sad and thousands killed. (In the winter of 1940-1 two hundred people a night were killed by bombs in Britain alone and an equal number injured.) But

those are figures one cannot take in. Here is one girl in her twenties doing her duty in the little task entrusted to her, injured for life in the doing, and smiling up into my face, her uninjured hand in mine. She is a member of the City Temple. She is a 'living stone' in an indestructible church, a temple not made with hands.

On we go in the little car. We are very interested in the Littletons. (That is not their name, of course.) There are ten children, and the father, up till recently, was unemployed. The City Temple has what I called an 'Adoption Scheme'. The idea is that every member, singly or with another, should *adopt* an unprivileged family. This doesn't mean patronage and charity. It means taking a loving interest in a family where life is hard. It means knowing the children's names, remembering birthdays, sharing the good things of life, lending a helping hand. The Littletons are our 'family'. My wife goes regularly to see them. We knew their neighbourhood had suffered. One morning, on my way to Broadcasting House, to broadcast in the early morning service, I had seen the people sweeping up the broken window-glass from the pavements as people sweep snow in winter. So we made for their home, the lower part of which had earlier been condemned as unfit for habitation. Opposite the house a factory had been gutted with fire-bombs. You would have regarded their home as wholly unfit for occupation. But there they were, cheerful as ever, Jim and Harry, Evelyn and Hilda, Tommy and Bob, Gladys and Mabel the twins, and the tinies, grinning as only Londoners can.

Why aren't they evacuated? you ask. They were. Their mother took a long journey, a new and frightening experience for her. She went with seven of her brood, including twin babies of eight months of age, to the address given. But something had gone wrong. 'There's only one bed in this house,' the owner told her crossly, 'and I'm sleeping in that.' Mrs. Littleton felt homesick and unwanted. She spent the night in a grocer's shop, the nearest A.R.P. post. Then back home she went, and she's not feeling very keen on further adventures. On the whole, the

evacuation scheme from the big cities has 'worked', but so big a scheme is bound to break down at some point. So Mrs. Littleton is going to 'stay put'.

The next visit is heartrending indeed! In a small house lived a father and mother and two daughters. One of the girls was a nurse on night duty. The other worked in the City. When the nurse returned from her duty in the early morning she could not find her home. It was just a heap of rubble. Underneath were her father and mother and sister. The parents were both killed. The sister owed her life to a wonderful exercise of presence of mind. When the explosion was over she was still alive. She pushed out her hand amid the rubble around her until she felt the alarm clock which had been near her bedside. Grasping it with the only hand she could move, she wound the hands round on the broken dial until the bell rang. The men in the demolition squad heard the bell and dug down to her and rescued her. Both her feet were broken, but she is still alive and very brave.

Our last visit that afternoon was to a little shop kept by two elderly ladies. How would you feel if the little business which was your only means of livelihood were ruined through war? They are too old to start again elsewhere. There is no one with youth and energy and capital to set them on their feet again. They are casualties in the war for freedom. We talked to them for a little while, saying the things that can be said. Then we had to leave them, face to face with disaster and possibly destitution.

Of course, one could cover pages with such stories. That is merely the record of one afternoon. And every minister who spent the winter of 1940-1 in London, when, night after night, the 'blitz' went on from dusk till dawn, could tell the same heart-rending tale. Underneath some churches shelters were constructed in which hundreds of people were accommodated every night through the whole winter, and pastors saw and took the chance to minister to them in spiritual, cultural, and physical ways. This was not possible at the City Temple. Our people live many miles from their church and there are only a handful of people at night in the City of London proper. But we have kept in touch with

our folk in all their hardships, dangers, and sorrows, and we shall do all we can for them till the horror ends.

A word might be said about our organizations. It was once said that the City Temple was a preaching place only. If ever it were that, it isn't so now. The officers in charge of these organizations are all church members. And membership is a matter which we do not view lightly. My able and devoted assistant, Miss Winifred Barton, interviews every prospective member, and to be a member of the City Temple is reckoned a high privilege.

Membership expresses itself in various ways. Every member is encouraged to join at least one of the organizations, for membership of a church without an active part in its work and close fellowship with others is scarcely worth calling membership at all.

One of our most fruitful organizations is the Friday Fellowship, which I have fully described in my book, *This is the Victory*. Every Friday evening 'young' people of all ages and both sexes meet to think and pray together about some aspect of the Christian life, particularly an aspect which presents a problem or difficulty.

It was here that we grew to know one another. We met together first of all for a few moments of worship. Then we broke up into groups, each group having its own leader and 'scribe'. The leader kept the group relevant in its thought and speech, though not with too great a strictness. The 'scribe' jotted down, and afterwards reported to the whole fellowship, the findings of the group and especially any point which needed further discussion. Then we had forty or fifty minutes of free and informal conversation, lifted the theme to its practical implication, dedicated ourselves to the newly-seen challenge, and went our way. The spiritual enthusiasm was a grand tonic to me personally and I regard the Friday Fellowship as the chief spiritual dynamo of the church. Anything said from the pulpit can here be challenged. No one gets on his 'high horse'. If he tries to do so, he is laughed off it. The good fellowship, the honest thinking, the passion for reality, the hatred of all that is pompous or insincere, the healthy laughter and the presence of Christ which so often descends upon us with breath-taking,

silencing nearness, have to be experienced. They cannot be described.

The Samaritan League I started soon after I came. It is for men only, though soon afterwards we started a women's movement doing similar work, and it flourishes. Homes have been found for the homeless, meals for the hungry (a thousand a year by the Samaritan League alone), clothes for the ill-clad, work for the workless, wireless for the lonely, friendship for the friendless, medical and surgical aid for the needy. Pensions have been obtained for scores, legal advice procured, prisoners visited in jail, and five thousand visits paid to render help in evil-smelling slums where poverty, filth, and vice prevail. In all this the women are not a whit behind the men. Not only is there a flourishing Women's League of Service, but a beautiful piece of work is done on every Monday afternoon when women are given spiritual encouragement, good fellowship, and refreshment, and their individual needs dealt with. One of the sad things about the fire is the entire destruction of clothing for the poor and destitute which had been recently received and was ready for immediate despatch.

Our Psychological Clinic is never 'written up'. We publish no report, no publicity articles, no balance sheet. But before war took some of them away, half a dozen Christian doctors with psychological qualifications helped me in dealing with those troubles, some with physical symptoms, all with spiritual symptoms, which distress of mind, conflict of soul, and overstrained 'nerves' engender. So often in the old days a patient with 'nerves' went to the minister and was told to trust God and pray, or was sent to the doctor and told to drink bromide and to rest, when what was needed was a thorough search into the roots of conflict, often obscured from the patient himself, until a new and healthier orientation could be found and a new path followed to liberty and joy and peace. I restrain myself from writing in detail of this work so dear to me. When you see a patient carried in to the Clinic and walking out, albeit unsteadily at first; when you meet a person in the street who says, as one did to me a month ago,



'You saved me from suicide'; when you receive letters almost daily which say, 'I found new health and life through your Clinic', or 'Thank you so much for ever introducing me to Dr. A, B, C or D; I am now a different person', then you rejoice that the City Temple is doing, in this way, part of the Master's work on earth. You realize that still He moves in the city streets, bringing, though it be through others, healing in His touch.

In addition, of course, we have what every church has, its Prayer Circle, its Children's Church, its Choir, its Literary Society, its Social Circle, its Missionary Committee, its loyal band of women who work and sew for Red Cross Funds and the funds of the Church. I will not write at length of these, not because they are not important, but because their story would not command the same interest.

A month after the great disaster, the City Temple suffered again, although there was little more that could be destroyed. At that time we had been graciously allowed by Dr. Sidney Berry to meet in the Memorial Hall, the headquarters of the Congregational Union. One Sunday morning in May, 1941, I set off to conduct worship with a heavy heart. All night the bombs had been dropping, the guns roaring, the shrapnel falling. I should think no one in London had had any sleep, and many hundreds had suffered. In the suburb where I live we had been fortunate this time, though my own home had been damaged by earlier raids. Yet I felt sad on this bright morning, and apprehensive of the stories of suffering my people would tell me.

Before we had gone a mile the bright sky had disappeared and given place to rolling clouds of smoke that covered the heavens with a pall of smoke and made the streets look as though it were a November evening. How we escaped punctures I have never understood. We drove continually over broken glass, and parked at last near Smithfield Market, three-quarters of a mile from the Memorial Hall, but as near as the police would allow us to take the car. Then we walked. Down one side of bomb craters we went, and up the other. Skirting piles of debris, including part of the famous Old Bailey Courts of Justice, which I saw come

down into the street; and clambering over baulks of timber and massive lumps of masonry, threading our way between and over hose-pipes, we came at last to Farringdon Street, which was blazing all down one side as far as one could see. Fortunately, the Memorial Hall was safe, though all approaches to it were dangerous, either from flames or from falling buildings. One could not pass up Ludgate Hill towards St. Paul's Cathedral, for the flames from both sides met in the middle of the street.

Yet the small hall in which we met to worship was crowded with people and many stood in the corridors outside. I took for my subject, 'The Power of God', and read part of that glorious letter of St. Peter to a church suffering the agony of persecution under the monster Nero. We felt gloriously close to the infant Church of the first century as we prayed and sang, with London burning all round us.

In the sermon I had to raise my voice to be heard above the hiss of the firemen's hoses and the roar of the flames devouring the buildings on the opposite side of the street. One of the buildings, which the whole congregation could see through the windows, bore the advertisement: 'Hot Sausages Ready!' I felt quite sure they were hot; too hot for the firemen to get near!

I shall never forget that service. In the middle of it a gas main exploded with a roar. The flames lit up the faces of the congregation, but only one fainted, and she had been up all night following the reception of the news that her brave airman lover was 'missing'. I turned to Mr. Clare—our faithful Church Secretary, who recently died—on one side of me and to Miss Barton on the other, and we whispered in consultation as to whether we should give up the idea of an evening service. I then announced that the second service would be held as usual. And again the people crowded the hall. I spoke on the inner serenity of spirit which Christ promised to those who trusted Him. We felt the Master was indeed in the midst and that no outward horror and destruction could invade our hearts.

That evening I had to go to the hospital to find out the truth about one of my best men, a member of the Church Council. In

doing duty for another, he had been instantly killed by an exploding bomb. I married him fourteen months ago to a bride who is a widow at twenty-three. I went out to see her, late that Sunday evening, in her suburban home. No one, unless he had an adequate hold on God, could be anything but dejected. Yet among my own people there was and is a marvellous serenity, based on the things war cannot touch. And the girl-widow I visited that night showed as fine a courage as a soldier in the front line.

I have described in detail that Sunday—the worst day I have ever lived through—because it tries to paint a picture of what my people are facing and the spirit in which they are facing it. Not one of us is in despair. These are great days for religion. We are in good heart, full of hope and confidence and determination. We, the living members of the spiritual City Temple,

Stand in the temple of our God  
As pillars—

And we refuse to be cast down. We are determined to build again on the same site and carry on our work. In the meantime, quite unsought, came the invitation of the Vicar of St. Sepulchre's Anglican Church, with the full approval of the Bishop of London, to worship in that lovely shrine, only a hundred yards from our doors, on the site of which worship has been offered to Christ for over a thousand years. The Vicar, the Rev. G. H. Salter, M.A., Anglican son of a Methodist father, has made a gesture which will do more for the cause of Christian unity than many discussions and conferences. His brotherly action and friendly spirit have endeared us all to him for ever. We can the better bear the sight of the gaunt walls of the ruined City Temple if all that has happened leads us to demolish the walls of misunderstanding which have separated the Christian denominations. St. Sepulchre's, or more correctly, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, more famous than our own, has itself suffered terrible damage from the enemy. The Verger's house is entirely destroyed and also the historic old watch-tower, from which watch was kept against the

body-snatchers who stole bodies from the graveyard for dissection in St. Bartholomew's Hospital opposite. Vestries were wrecked. Lovely stained-glass windows were blown in. But at St. Sepulchre's we meet twice every Sunday. The Vicar conducts his services in the Church of St. Bartholomew-the-Less, in the precincts of the famous hospital (Bart's) of which he is the chaplain. We have to arrange our week-night activities as best we can. At the time of writing every organization is meeting except the Literary Society. That did become impossible.

It need hardly be said that we long inexpressibly to build our own church again, and if these words catch the eye—as they will—of some who, for various reasons, have escaped any personal experience of horror or distress, bereavement or loss, and if, as a thank-offering to God for immunity or escape, they feel they can give a tiny percentage of what they have been allowed to retain while others have lost everything, then let them send help to a church, with depleted resources and no home of its own, which is trying to strengthen spiritual morale, to comfort and succour the distressed, to provide the basis and only dynamic of a new order, to extend the Kingdom of God, to hasten the time when war shall never again spoil God's earth and spread sorrow and loss through His lovely world.

The sermons that follow were mostly preached at St. Sepulchre's, but that church also suffered repeated damage from the flying-bomb horror in the early summer of 1944. On one occasion the window-substitutes were blown out by blast within forty-eight hours of being put in. We have had to move again and again. The Fyvie Hall in Regent Street and the Portland Hall in Titchfield Street have had to be used; but now we are back at St. Sepulchre's and hope to remain there until the end of the war, though even as I write this, Hitler's V2 bombs are falling on London: One fell after this MS. had gone to press which killed 163 people, injured the Verger's wife and 500 others. Three hundred were detained in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and more windows at St. Sepulchre's were destroyed. My secretary, Miss Winifred Haddon, deserves high praise. She retyped this MS. in circum-

stances of personal danger and has remained at her post through the whole of the war.

I have kept the direct method of address and printed the sermons in the main as they were preached. I have even left references like 'last Sunday', and so on, because by this means the relationship of minister-to-people, the intimate *rapproch* which preaching creates, is maintained.

I have omitted sermons commonly called topical, in which one tries to relate the events of the day to the great truths of God. I have, in my selection, sought to include expository, psychological, devotional, social and evangelistic sermons, sermons for the young and for the old, for the student, and for the 'plain man'. I have added a Questionary at the end, hoping that fellowship-groups and Class-meetings may find help in it for discussion, although leaders will probably desire to frame their own questions. I should like to think that if any people read this book who criticize the Church and yet who never go to one, they might be induced to join in fellowship. The Church needs everyone of goodwill to help it in its work. But it has something of inexpressible value to offer—namely, for individuals, communities, and nations, a new integration of life on the soundest of all bases. Some of us believe that, because the Spirit of Christ still lives in His Church and acts through it, it is, in spite of division and failure, the great hope of the world. It is easy to stand outside and criticize. Why not come in and help to make the vision a glorious reality?

LESLIE D. WEATHERHEAD

THE CITY TEMPLE

c/o THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

HOLBORN VIADUCT, LONDON, E.C.

Easter, 1945

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SILENCE

I WANT to show you this afternoon three ways in which silence is significant. I shall ask you to note first the significance of silence in the hour of the soul's exaltation; second, the significance of silence in the hour of the soul's grief; and, third, the significance of silence in the hour of the soul's refusal to come to grips with reality.

I think the hour that stands out most in my memory of my last summer holiday was an hour of silence. I was staying at Jordans in Buckinghamshire, that lovely, secluded Quaker settlement, with its old-world garden, its ancient barn built from the timbers of the *Mayflower*, and its sense of quietude. It always seems like Sunday afternoon at Jordans.

One September morning I got up at a quarter to seven, walked through the kitchen garden, up through the orchard where the owls were still crying, through a gate and into a meadow. But not only into a meadow, into a great silence. It was in the meadow that I met God. The ground was so drenched with dew that it looked as if it were covered with hoar frost. The sun was peeping over the horizon, throwing long shadows upon the grass. It was an hour of bewitching loveliness. Magic was in the air and awe in my heart. One had that strange impression, which probably you have had many times, that one was being allowed to be present just as God had concluded the creation of the world, that one was seeing the world all new and fresh from His hand. There was a solemn hush which seemed to fall over the whole field and everything in it.

In a way it was a strange experience. One doesn't *plan* such hours of insight when one goes for a summer holiday. Yet at the end of that holiday, having done perhaps all the things one planned to do, the thing that stands out most is an hour of silence when the

soul was caught up in rapturous worship and allowed to behold part of the beauty of God. You know that God is near, that He is speaking to you, that He has brought you to that hour and to that place, in order to say things to you in the silence that otherwise you would not stay to hear.

I had a similar experience some years ago after preaching in Lincoln. I didn't know who was going to be my host, but after the meeting, which was very hot, very noisy and very uncomfortable, a simple-hearted farmer came up, almost shyly, and said that he was to be my host. He apologized for not having a motor car. If only he could have known how my heart exulted as we bowled through the narrow lanes in a gig. I felt like a child in fairyland. The gig lamps lit the chestnut haunches of the mare, threw strange, thrilling shadows on the hedgerows and the lower branches of the trees, and frightened here and there a chattering blackbird from its roost. We drew up with a glorious clatter of hoofs on the cobbles of a farmyard. I felt it had all happened before, perhaps a hundred years ago. One has that feeling sometimes. Men shouted and ran to the unharnessing, and then supper followed in a huge kitchen with a mighty log fire. Hams hung from the ceiling. Dogs pushed their noses into your hand in friendly welcome. The kettle sang on the hearth. A great ginger cat sprawled on an oak settee in the chimney corner. We sat down to a white wood table scrubbed as clean and spotless as linen could be. Then followed pipes and talk and a prayer together, and then the never-to-be-forgotten experience. I was led to a bedroom filled with moonlight and the fragrance of lavender sheets. The bedroom window was thrown up, and when I was alone I knelt at the open window and the sound that thrilled me was the sound of a very distant train being shunted. Chug, chug, chug . . . then a lot of quick chugs together. It sounds foolish to say that one was thrilled by the sound of a train, however far off. But the fact is that sounds of that nature interpret the silence. They alone make one apprehend how utterly still and quiet is the night. The silent majesty of that moonlight night lying upon the hushed fields like the supernatural glory of God, needed some gentle sound to interpret

and emphasize it. Then the second interpreting sound—also far away—a village clock striking twelve. I shall never forget that night. I felt so wrapped in the presence of God that I didn't want to lose it in sleep.

I felt that I understood a little better that strange experience of Elijah. After the wind and the earthquake and fire he heard 'a still small voice',<sup>1</sup> or if we interpret the original more literally—and you will find the words in the margin of the Revised Version—'a sound of gentle stillness'. The sound interpreted the silence. Let us note, then, in the first place how often the hour of the soul's exaltation is an hour of silence.

Some words of Pascal come to the mind in this regard. 'All the evils of life', he said, 'have fallen upon us because men will not sit alone quietly in a room.' Such a statement sounds remote from the busy planning of our minds and the doing of our hands and the running of our feet, but the more I think about it the more I think it is true. Is not the truth of the matter that we live at such a speed and our lives are so rushed and hectic that God has very little chance with us? He cannot make Himself heard above the bustle and the noise. And I know that I need it to be said to me, therefore I dare think you may need it to be said to you, that, when we are engaged on the very work of God Himself, we are so hurried and rushed that, as it were, we are closed down to all other stations, open only on one wavelength, that of our own concerns, and therefore insensitive and unreceptive to His voice.

If you agree that the soul's hour of exaltation is an hour of silence, try to receive the thought that therefore the time of silence is most likely to produce the soul's exaltation. I will not at this point go into all the psychology that lies behind that claim, but I am certain it is true. We notice and take advantage of this psychological truth in many ways. If rest is marked by relaxation, then to achieve a relaxed state will often bring the desired rest. One is glad to find that even the busy St. Paul has a word to those eager Thessalonians—'Study to be quiet.'<sup>2</sup> And we need that quiet not that we may think more positively, whipping our mind

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xix. 12.

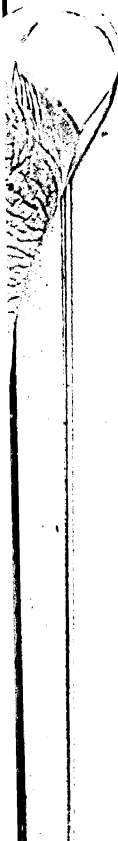
<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians iv. 11.



to activity, or do more and more, spurring our will to greater effort, but that we may, in quiescent relaxation of mind, receive and commune.

I find a clue in the behaviour of others which helps me to understand my own needs in this matter. There are hours of exaltation when the silence of the soul is carelessly broken into pieces by the noisy burglary of one's peace of mind and the treasures of the silent hour on the part of someone else. If another can rob me of the harvest of the silent hour by some vulgar remark, how often do I rob myself and spoil a silence which God could use, by vulgarly and unnecessarily breaking into it with some petty and unimportant detail?

How exquisitely this kind of outrage is described by Rupert Brooke.<sup>1</sup> I cannot spoil the lovely poem by quoting a small part of it. Listen to this:



Safe in the magic of my woods  
I lay, and watched the dying light.  
Faint in the pale high solitudes,  
And washed with rain and veiled by night.  
Silver and blue and green were showing.  
And the dark woods grew darker still;  
And birds were hushed; and peace was growing;  
And quietness crept up the hill;  
And no wind was blowing . . .  
And I knew  
That this was the hour of knowing,  
And the night and the woods and you  
Were one together, and I should find  
Soon in the silence the hidden key  
Of all that had hurt and puzzled me—  
Why you were you, and the night was kind,  
And the woods were part of the heart of me.  
And there I waited breathlessly,  
Alone; and slowly the holy three,  
The three that I loved, together grew  
One, in the hour of knowing,  
Night, and the woods, and you—

<sup>1</sup> Rupert Brooke, *The Complete Poems* (Sidgwick and Jackson).

And suddenly  
There was an uproar in my woods,  
The noise of a fool in mock distress,  
Crashing and laughing and blindly going,  
Of ignorant feet and a swishing dress,  
And a Voice profaning the solitudes.

The spell was broken, the key denied me.  
And at length your flat, clear voice beside me  
Mouthed cheerful clear flat platitudes.  
You came and quacked beside me in the wood.  
You said, 'The view from here is very good!'  
You said, 'It's nice to be alone a bit!'  
And, 'How the days are drawing out!' you said.  
You said, 'The sunset's pretty, isn't it?'

By God! I wish—I wish that you were dead!

How significant silence can be! Of such a silence Wordsworth wrote, 'I made no vows, but vows were made for me'. And the praying of Jesus night after night amid the silent, lonely hills that rise from the Galilean Lake, would not, I feel sure, be full of wordy petition, but of the sharing of a love-interpreted silence.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
The silence of eternity,  
Interpreted by love!

'... He went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, He was there alone.'<sup>1</sup>

Note, secondly, the significance of silence in the hour of the soul's grief. This is the time to think about grief, for the air is full of thrilling news which seems a foretaste of victory. But if Europe is invaded, there will be grief and suffering and pain and sorrow for many. What will you do if grief assails you? Will you rush into activity? Will you try to fill your mind with other thoughts? Will you plunge yourself into the tumult of life? Will

<sup>1</sup>Matthew xiv. 23.

you seek in the whirl and rush of both duty and pleasure to dull your aching heart?

I am not minimizing the value of activity. Again and again to get on with the next job is the best medicine you could use. But, however severe the disease, no patient can go on drinking medicine all the time, and, however great our grief, activity must come to an end, and then there is silence which only practice beforehand can help us to use in the hour of sorrow. Without such practice the silence may be full of bitter rebellion, bleak remorse, bitter cynicism. But for the mind practised in the use of silence, activity will accomplish something, but an interpreted silence will accomplish more.

Jesus, I think, must have been very fond of John the Baptist, His cousin. 'Save the sons of the kingdom,' said Jesus, 'among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.'<sup>1</sup> John was murdered to please a nautch-girl, and the disciples came and told Jesus. He did not sit down and talk to them. He did not preach a sermon on the nature of suffering or the place of evil and death in the world. He said, 'Let us go out into a desert place and be alone'. He knew the significance of silence in the hour of grief.

There is a clue for us again in the intuitive way we try to help others in their hour of grief. Only the fool intrudes with words. We seem to realize for others that, in their hour of grief, if they possess spiritual resources, they will turn to them. If they don't possess them, it isn't the time to press them. They must in fact be discovered later when the mind is not so disturbed. No one wants explanations when his heart is broken. He wants the healing silence of God. Even if Christ in the flesh could be present in an hour of grief, I think men would ask Him nothing, but in His presence they would find everything. There would be nothing left to ask. He must be so real to us that in the hour of grief we can turn to Him and find the healing of a love-interpreted silence in His presence. We cannot receive more than that silent friendship. We don't need more.

<sup>1</sup>Matthew xi. 11.

I never realized how dreadfully irrelevant and almost vulgar words could be in the hour of grief until an experience befell me in a home where a little girl dearly loved one particular doll. The doll was broken by the carelessness of a person who turned on the little child and said, in words that seemed to sear one's brain as they were spoken, 'I'll buy you another'. A child's grief is so real and so terrible that it seemed as bad as saying to a mother who has lost her child, 'Well, you have other children'. Or to a man who has lost his dearest friend, 'Well, you have got other friends'. No newly bought doll, however expensive and marvellous, could make up for that dear treasure on whom love had been so lavished that the very paint had been kissed off its face. There it lay in cruel pieces, and nothing on earth could replace it, or make up the sense of loss. With the sublime dignity and the spiritual insight that made Jesus Himself put a little child in the midst of men, this little girl looked up into her mother's eyes and said, 'Don't talk about it, please, mummy'. She only wanted to be quiet. There was nothing that could be said. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and healing for that heart is silence.

So, in the hour of His men's overwhelming sorrow, He, who had insight into human grief, did not fill the last hours with advice or reiterated commands or repeated lessons, but simply said, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now'.<sup>1</sup>

But look lastly at the significance of silence in the hour of the soul's refusal to come to grips with reality. One of the most awful states of soul into which man can fall is a condition in which no words can do any good. 'Come down from the Cross', they cried. 'Let the Christ now come down from the Cross, that we may see and believe.'<sup>2</sup> But there was no answer. Only silence. Pilate saith unto Him, 'Whence art Thou?'<sup>3</sup> And Jesus gave him no answer. Herod questioned Him in many words, 'But He answered him nothing'.<sup>4</sup> Is there another occasion in history or in literature where silence plays such a significant part as in the

<sup>1</sup> John xvi. 12.    <sup>2</sup> Mark xv. 32.    <sup>3</sup> John xix. 9    <sup>4</sup> Luke xxiii. 9.

scene in Herod's palace, when the Master stood before him? Says St. Luke: 'Herod with his soldiers set Him at nought and mocked Him, and arraying Him in gorgeous apparel, sent Him back to Pilate.'<sup>1</sup> And Herod and Pilate, formerly enemies, became friends over the body of Jesus.

I see in imagination Herod, with Christ before him, secretly feeling uncomfortable, as sensual people always do in the presence of goodness, and trying to maintain 'face' by breaking Christ's silence. Herod's dirty jests and derisive laughter are directed at the Master. If He had answered, His answers would have been made the basis of more jesting. 'But Jesus answered him nothing.' The bawdy jokes and unclean innuendoes made no impression at all. It must have been like watching the foul scum of a stagnant pool fall away from the unstainable white breast of a silent swan, who, with proud head and lovely curved neck and dignified poise, sits enthroned on waters whose filth she scarcely deigns to notice. Why did He not reply? Because in the mood in which His tormentors were, there was nothing to be said. He would only have increased their sin by providing it with further occasion for its foul expression.

O my soul, bring not down upon thyself the silence of Jesus! Better His cry of woe such as the Pharisee heard: better His word of appeal such as the sinner heard: better His cry of rebuke such as the disciple heard. It is a terrible indication of a state of soul when Jesus says nothing. 'Be not silent unto me, O God,' cried the Psalmist, 'lest if Thou be silent unto me, I become like them that go down into the pit',<sup>2</sup> into the final darkness, into the age-long night.

There are two ways of getting through life, and I think we must decide which we shall follow. Some people try one way and some another. The first way is to stop thinking. The second way is to stop and think. A great many people are trying the first way. They rush from this to that. They fill up every hour. They dare

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm xxviii. 1.

not be alone. They give God no chance. They are never silent, never quiet, never utterly relaxed, receptive, submissive, waiting. This method always fails because, of course, one cannot maintain the pace. One cannot travel fast enough. Something happens that one did not engineer, could not foresee and cannot forestall. Suddenly, God *makes* a silence in their lives, or uses one that illness makes, and then they are afraid. Silence is so strange to them. They have never made it their friend and never made it the occasion of realizing the healing friendship of God.

There is a much better way. It is that, from time to time, we should stop and think. I am not going to say to you, 'Keep an hour's quiet time every morning before breakfast'. If I said that you would do nothing about it at all and tell yourself that I was talking nonsense and could not possibly understand just how busy you are. But do let me remind you that the old Hebrew word 'Sabbath' comes from a root which means 'stop doing what you are doing'. So may I suggest that once a week, perhaps every Sunday evening, or whichever time you yourself decide, in addition to daily prayers, you should give yourself half an hour—if that is all you can spare—and be alone, quiet, silent, listening and looking? Perhaps He will say to you something in such a silence that will make that half an hour the supreme experience, not of a week, but of a lifetime. Remember how significant silence is in the hour of the soul's exaltation. So give your soul the occasion of such exaltation by arranging a time of silence for it. Remember that in such a silence He can do something for you so that the hour of grief—and grief must come at some time to us all—may be an hour in which we can lay hold of life's resources, be strong to endure, and able to turn our hurt to the healing of others as well as ourselves. And, lest we ever become as those who silence Christ Himself by trifling with life, to whom God is remote and unreal, for whom even the eternal and lovely things are cold and dead, let us stop and think from time to time. Look life in the face. Study to be quiet. Make time to listen. You may miss Him in the wind, the storm, the fire. But in an interpreted silence you will find Him and make Him your Friend. There is only one man

whom nothing can finally overwhelm. He is the man who has God for his friend.

- O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
The silence of eternity,  
Interpreted by love!

## YOUTH LOOKS AT CHRIST

THIS evening I want to talk to young people about Jesus Christ. If we are to grasp what Christianity is really about, I think it is very important that in our minds there should be a picture of Christ that is clear and true. Indeed, I don't think we can successfully carry out the Christian programme for society and the world, or enter a rich devotional experience, unless we turn again and again and look at Him. Many of you in this crowded congregation have made long journeys on a hot summer night to worship with us. You will not have wasted your time if you catch even a glimpse of Jesus. You can be a good Communist without a clear picture of Karl Marx in your mind. You cannot make much of a fist of Christianity without looking long and hard at Christ. For Christianity is not a social or political programme nor, primarily, a theological system. It is a way of life. It depends not so much on understanding intellectual ideas and working them out with enthusiasm, as on a relationship with a Person that has its outcome in a certain quality of life. If Christianity is supremely a relationship with a Person, the more we know about the Person, and the more clearly we see Him, the better. Someone has said all that in three words—'Christianity is Christ'.

In the various denominations and sects the emphasis is sometimes found to be on matters which I cannot but regard as of less importance. For instance, creeds are important. I should not like to be thought to disparage them. But they were formulated, not as final expressions of truth, but to combat invading error. If we begin with the creeds, we may get lost in the maze of an intellectual theology and see very little of Christ. Ritual and ceremony are important. They were invented, I suppose, to symbolize great truths, to make an appeal through the eye which by constant repetition would assist faith to grasp the truth behind the ceremony.



But to begin there might lead some simple souls to bewilderment, and one remembers that some of the best Christians in the world—the Quakers—do not emphasize ritual at all. All the beautiful things that play a part in a service like this have a valuable place. The architecture of this old church, the stained-glass windows, the carefully prepared music are all there to assist faith. But care must be taken lest these lovely things lead us only to purposeless and unchallenging æstheticism. Our picture of Christ then might only be that of a sentimental and unreal Person.

To-night, therefore, I should like to ask you imaginatively to go back and start at the beginning where the disciples started: Jesus looking at youth and youth looking at Jesus. And at the close I shall ask all the young people present whether they don't think that here is a Leader worth following, here is One who really has got the secret we are all looking for—the secret of the art of living—and, indeed, whether or not here is One who can do a unique thing for us, One who can deal with human sin, and who alone, of all the great ones of the earth, is entitled to be called the Saviour. He has done so much with such unpromising material that, if you think for a moment, you must admit that He is likely to be able to do something with us, in spite of all our bad habits and secret sins and overwhelming worries and dark despair. I should like the end of the service to mean that some of you really put Him to the test to find that He is the Master of life, and that the greatest fullness and the maximum joy can be found by those who embark on the Christian adventure in the strength of His loving friendship. I believe that when Christianity began; when a young Man stood up on the green hillside above the blue waters of the Galilean Lake and talked to people, they said within themselves, 'This is what we have been looking for all our lives'. Up till to-night you may possibly have felt that the Church had nothing to say that was relative to your own life. You may have been disgusted by denominational squabbles and quarrelling sects. Banish all that from your minds for the moment. Remember that all the denominations of Christendom are one in this, that they seek to

bring sin-wrecked lives and broken hearts and wounded spirits into touch with Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity begins there.

I am going to mention five or six things about Jesus which I am sure would appeal to youth. If you want to write them down, feel perfectly free to do so. You might then, in some quiet hour of recollection, think them over and etch more deeply upon your mind the picture of Jesus that I want you to see.

1. Strange as it may seem to some who have gone a long way in their Christian experience, I want to begin by talking about His physical appearance. To youth, physical appearances are important, and, if we are going to make a picture of Christ, we cannot make it only with non-physical elements, and, by deliberately trying to imagine what He looked like, we may correct any picture previously held in the mind which is too effeminate, too much like the stained-glass window, too unreal. We may safely say, I think, that Jesus was physically a very fit man. He lived in the open air. Even the carpenter's shop of the East was in the open air. His love of birds and flowers and grass makes me think that He must often have walked miles over the hills above Nazareth, and, since from the hills above His home one can still see the blue waters of the Mediterranean, I feel perfectly certain that He often walked to the coast and bathed in the sea. He was a son of the open air, and His mind was so full of lovely ideas, and His life so full of unselfish deeds, that it is hard to suppose they did not affect His physical form. At any rate, to whatever degree our bodies may depend on our ancestors, the expression of the face, and particularly of the eyes, is some kind of reflection of the soul.

I am quite certain, in my own mind, from the expressions which the Evangelists use, that the eyes of Jesus were very remarkable. 'He looked round on them with anger' (Mark iii. 5). 'Jesus, looking upon him, loved him' (Mark x. 21). 'The Lord turned and looked upon Peter' (Luke xxii. 61). His eyes often flashed with merriment, for His discourse often breaks out into humour. His eyes often blazed with anger. It was the disciple who loved Him best who said afterwards, 'His eyes were as a flame of fire'

(Revelation i. 14). Sometimes those eyes were dim with tears, as when He brooded over Jerusalem. Sometimes they melted in tenderness as He stooped over some stricken form. Sometimes they wore the stern expression of rebuke, as when His beloved Peter tempted Him. Sometimes they looked like chilled steel as He turned His face to Jerusalem and the Cross outside the city wall. Sometimes they filled with the anguish of suffering, and at least on two occasions we are told that He broke down and sobbed. They were eyes that could win men, but eyes that could wither men. They were eyes that could forgive and eyes that could condemn. They were eyes that delighted in the flight of a bird to its nest, but eyes that could follow the evasions of a fugitive spirit to its farthest funk-hole. His eyes were the homes of all men's dreams, and could bring life to the dead and hope to the most degraded.

Let us begin there, then, with a picture of One, tall and dark like most Easterners, with a body disciplined by hard physical toil, a face lit up by loving thoughts that dwelt so much on God, and whose physical presence has never satisfactorily been portrayed even by the greatest artists the world has ever known.

2. I think the second thing that would strike youth looking at Jesus would be His inner joy. Deep in His personality there was unbroken joy. You may remind me at once that He was the 'Man of Sorrows', but I would remind you that joy and sorrow are not the kind of opposites which cancel one another out, and that the opposite of joy is not sorrow, but unbelief. Jesus Christ was not a dull or depressing person, long-faced and melancholy. 'Are you a parson?' asked a man in the train of a fellow-passenger. 'No,' said the other, 'I've had influenza. That's what makes me look like that.' My friends present who are of my own profession will forgive me if I say that I don't think Jesus of Nazareth would be very much like the official parson. I think He would talk a great deal about religion, and yet I don't think we should tumble to the fact that He was so talking for some time, for He would not use theological words or ecclesiastical clichés. He would talk about religion as a person who is keen about anything talks about that in

which he is supremely interested, and His enthusiasm would be infectious and we should find ourselves listening, with eager eyes, longing for Him to go on. We should not feel that religion was something remote from life, or difficult to understand, or something about which men quarrelled, or which other men were paid to teach. I think we should feel about religion, while Jesus was speaking, as we feel when a nature-lover talks to us about the habits of birds and the joys of the countryside. Religion, so far from being difficult and depressing, would stir us like the wind on the heath or a sunny day by the sea-shore. If the bishop comes to tea, though he tries with all his might to be human and friendly, we don't feel quite ourselves until he has gone, and when the door closes on him, we breathe a sigh of relief and wonder whether we said anything we should not have said. But I believe that if Jesus of Nazareth came into our homes, He would be the life and soul of any party, and when He went away, we should feel as we feel when, on some summer afternoon, clouds suddenly veil the glory of the sunshine and a chilly wind stirs through the trees. He was such good company that His fondness for parties and the happiness He brought to them became a scandal. 'A gluttonous Man', they said, 'and a wine-bibber, a Friend of publicans and sinners.' What a strange thing it is they called Him 'the Man of Sorrows', and yet He got into trouble for being the Man of joy! I believe that, if Jesus of Nazareth in the flesh could come back to us, His presence would be a revelation. It would be marvellous to be with Him. We should wish for Him to stay a bit longer, and hate to see the door close on His departing form. And I believe He could go into any officers' mess, as someone has said, or any university common-room, or any stokehold amongst the crew, or any factory amongst the workers at lunch-time, or any group of students, or men who had been working in the pit, and be sincerely welcome, not making folk feel edgy and a little embarrassed as so many good people do, but making them feel that His life was joyous and serene, as clean and happy as the dawn, and that theirs might be the same if they learnt His secret.

3. I think the third thing that would attract youth would be His attitude to others. If men were hypocrites, really pretending to be something they never tried to be, I think His language would blast them out of their smug complacency, and either make them take further cover from Him, or come into a new sincerity they had never known. I think if men were cruel to little children, He would not mince His words; if they were spiritually proud, His glance and words would strip them naked. These three sins seemed to Him the worst, but the great majority of people are none of these three things. They have their sins, God knows, but they are not the three worst which He so continually condemned. Men and women who worry about their sins worry about lust and meanness and bad temper. He would not pass over these things. He is too good a Friend for that, but He would deliver us from our self-despising and show us that He saw other things within us 'beside our sins. So often we label people according to some outstanding failing, forgetting that very rarely does a label account for the whole bottle, unless the label says 'the mixture'. Jesus had a wonderful way of seeing past the labels that men fix to others and accept as accounting for themselves. In one who was labelled a grasping, little money-grabber, Jesus saw 'a son of Abraham',<sup>1</sup> and in one whom everybody thought of as the harlot from Magdala, Jesus noticed a woman with a wonderful gift of loving.<sup>2</sup>

I think Jesus's secret of helping people lay partly there, that He always saw the good in them and acted positively toward it, in such a way as to call it forth into such glorious life that the unclean and unholy things withered away, having no room to live. What we so often forget ourselves is that, hypocrisy, cruelty, and pride apart, no one has ever helped another in this world by giving him mere disapproval. If fellowship is established, there is often a time, not only for criticism, but direct condemnation. But we don't wait until that fellowship is established. To criticize in such a situation—before fellowship is established—is simply to make a gulf between yourself and the person you criticize. Very soon you are shouting at one another across the gulf. The person you

<sup>1</sup> Luke xix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vii. 47.

criticize, even though your motive is to help him, shouts back in an attempt to justify himself. But if you began with the good in him, and allowed yourself to think well of him because of that good, you would not need to point out his faults. He would be quick to see them himself and eager to correct them. That is what happened to Zacchaeus. The poor little chap was up a tree in more senses than one. Everybody saw his faults; everybody despised him and hated him and sneered at him. Nobody had ever shown him kindness. Nobody had ever sought his friendship. Nobody had ever believed that he had a best to be believed in. It is not irreverent to glory in the psychological insight of Jesus as well as in His divine love. Listen to what He said to Zacchaeus. 'I must abide at thy house.'<sup>1</sup> Not—'Come and have supper with Me', which would be patronizing and doing Zacchaeus a favour. But—'May I have supper with you?' making Zacchaeus the host, put in a position to do something for Jesus. What healing for Zacchaeus lay in that simple difference! And as they walked along Jesus said nothing about Zacchaeus's faults. He didn't even hint at them. It was Zacchaeus who began to talk about them, and who, before the supper party began, had himself taken the initiative to put things right. Even to a woman taken in adultery, whom others were ready to stone, Jesus said, 'I do not condemn you'.<sup>2</sup> That does not mean there was nothing to be condemned. It means that there was no need to do the condemning. The woman was condemning herself, and the highest court of authority which ever judges man is the judgement he passes upon himself in the light of the purity of God. The rebuke of Jesus was not condemnation of those who knew they were wrong. It was the silent rebuke of His own unstained purity.

4. Then, fourthly, I am quite sure that the courage of Jesus would immensely appeal to youth. His physical courage was itself an amazing thing. Has it occurred to you that, when the disciples ran away, Jesus might easily have done the same? And no one would ever condemn a person for seeking to escape when an armed

<sup>1</sup> Luke xix. 5.

<sup>2</sup> John viii. 11.

mob had set out to kill him. What a terrible rebuke of cowardice His courage was! What would one have given to have seen the flashing eyes of Jesus, when, before the majesty of His bearing and the sting of His words, men drove their beasts out of the holy place? We need not make much of the whip of small cords. He may have used it on the oxen. He would have no need to use it on the men. In imagination we can hear His voice above the tumult and the din, ringing through the Temple courts, penetrating to the Holy of Holies itself: 'My House shall be called the House of prayer for all nations, and ye have made it a den of thieves.'

But His spiritual courage was greater still. Every one to whom He spoke held Moses in the highest possible esteem. Yet the Master had the courage to say, 'Moses said so-and-so, but *I* say unto you . . .' To those who regarded it as blasphemy, Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one'. He longed for friendship, and He had that instinctive longing for approval which is so deep in the heart of every man and woman, but He stuck to convictions and preached them fearlessly, though they made Him utterly lonely amongst those with whom He most desired to be friendly. Let us look at Him, and when fear makes us slaves to what other people think and do and say, let us turn back and look at Him again.

Yet youth loves the high demand. No Church has ever done a service to youth by watering down the august and tremendous claims which Jesus makes. I feel sick at heart when I hear of a Church that, by lowering the threshold, seeks to entice youth into its fellowship. 'Come and join the cricket club. We have a good billiard table. There's a Social Hour, with coffee and buns, after the service next Sunday night. The service doesn't take long; so *do* come.' And all that sort of thing. The higher you make the threshold, the steeper you make the path, the more will you attract all that is grandest in youth. When Jesus found an attractive young man, He didn't pat him on the back and press him into His friendship, thinking how useful his money would be in Judas's bag. Because that money stood in the path of the soul's progress, Jesus said, 'You will never find life until you get rid of

that'. I think it is because Jesus makes the demands so hard that we all love Him. If the Christian religion were a movement that you could support or not as you pleased, a sort of interest like collecting stamps or playing golf, which some people take up and some people do not; if it made no demands on that which we know to be the finest thing about ourselves, our powers of self sacrifice, then youth would pass it by. For note this: that although youth criticizes the Churches bitterly, and in the main thinks little of parsons, and is not very attracted by organized religion, youth never criticizes Jesus Christ, and the severest criticism of us in the Churches is that we are not sufficiently like Him.

5. The only other quality we have time to glance at is His divinity, and, of course, long books have been written on this one subject alone, and I am not pretending to deal adequately with it, save to remind you of His mysterious claims. For as we look at Jesus to-night, I want our admiration and love to pass into something else, as it did with those who watched Him in Galilee. We, too, catch our breath and ask with others—'What manner of man is this?' 'I am the Light of the world', He said. 'I am the Bread of life.' 'I am the Truth'—the thing all philosophers since time began have sought in vain. 'Before Abraham was, I am.' 'By their attitude to Me,' He said, 'men will be judged.' 'No one cometh unto the Father but by Me.' 'The world is well lost if I am gained.' 'Your sins are forgiven you.' 'I will give to them eternal life.' . . . This is the most monstrous egotism ever seen on earth, or else the truth is that in a unique sense He was God, that all the values of God which humanity can contain were found in Him; that I am not merely to obey His teaching or work out His ideas in a movement, but that I am to worship Him and find in Him cleansing from sin, salvation from such a night of horror awaiting the separated soul that the only word to describe it is death.

So I will leave the matter. At some later date I should like to show you the breath-taking contrasts in His nature. Let us glance at them in closing. He was so human that He is well named 'the



Son of Man'. We feel that this is what humanity ought to be. Yet, if we deny His divinity, His words do not make sense, for His claims are those of One who was either insane or divine. We see a child sitting upon His knee and looking up into His face and laughing, feeling perfectly at home, and then we watch powerful enemies shrinking away from Him, plotting together for months before they could encompass His death. I hear Him claiming that by their attitude to Him men would at last be judged, and then I hear Him inviting people to Him, and, in order to make them at home, telling them that He Himself was meek and lowly of heart. He said the most dreadful things that have ever been said about sin, and from His tender lips comes the doctrine of hell; yet he said the tenderest things to sinners that human ears have ever heard and He made friends with those from whom even the merely respectable shrank back in horror. He claimed to be one with God, and yet He shrank away from all applause. As we saw, He was so joyous that joy bubbled up in merriment and raised a scandal; yet for two thousand years men in the deepest grief, and women who are broken-hearted, have found that the 'Man of Sorrows' alone can understand them. He said at last that all authority was given to Him in heaven and on earth, and yet one who knew Him best quoted Him as saying, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father, and yet He will not burgle the house of life, or have any violence done to our mental processes, or break down any of the doors of personality, but wait and knock and love until we ourselves invite Him to be the Master of our lives.

I cannot explain Him to you. To try to describe Him is an impossible task. I can only try from the gospel records to show you a glimpse of Him. All I know is that He holds my heart enthralled and always will. I know I am not worthy to be His friend. Yet, God helping me, though I turn back a thousand times, and wound Him a hundred times in a day, I will never desert Him utterly, turn my back upon Him and walk out into the final darkness.

Having caught even a glimpse of Him I cannot for long live without Him. My proud and stubborn and sinful heart may go its own way without Him for days together, but then I find that life is becoming cold and bleak, empty and desolate, dull and meaningless. It is as though the sun had gone out of the sky in summer-time and winter was back again. I feel depressed unto death, hurting others, breaking His heart, becoming irritable and unhappy. And then I turn back to Him again, and find that He will forgive me and restore me and receive me back into His endless friendship; and to be received into that friendship is to be saved. I am not at the end of the journey, but I am back on the road which will bring me at last to that blessedness which is His will and which, at my best, is my own desire. I don't understand Him, but—

If Jesus Christ is a man,—  
And only a man,—I say  
That of all mankind I cleave to him,  
And to him will I cleave alway.

If Jesus Christ is a god,—  
And the only God,—I swear  
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,  
The earth, the sea, and the air!<sup>1</sup>

I think Martin Luther's words are true: 'Take hold of Jesus as a man and you will discover that He is God.'

Youth, you cannot help loving Him, and, if you will only look at Him, you will find that you cannot thereafter be happy for long without Him. You will never be able to turn away from Him finally again. You will have seen too much. Let me call you back to Him now. If you have sinned, He will forgive you. If you are even now intending to sin, He will save you. If you want to be a crusader and build a new world, He will not only lead you in your thinking, but empower you in your doing, and go on giving you power when the power in mere ideas and movements is exhausted by man's selfishness. If you are sad and broken, He will comfort and restore you. If you have no

<sup>1</sup> R. W. Gilder, 'The Song of a Heathen sojourning in Galilee, A.D. 32', *Christ in the Poetry of Today* (The Woman's Press, New York).

belief in yourself left, let me remind you that He believes in you when you don't believe in yourself any longer, and forgives you when you can't forgive yourself any more. Turn to Him now, receive Him now, for He is present in this quiet and holy place, on the site of which for over a thousand years men and women have sought and found Him. Begin again with Him. Keep on looking at Him and listening to Him. Christianity is Christ. If only I can bring you into living touch with Him, He will do the rest. Where He touches, there is healing. Where He beckons, there the light shines. Where He companions, there is peace.

### III

## IS IT REALLY GOOD TO BE ALIVE?

'LIFE is sweet, brother. . . . There's day and night, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, all sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath.'<sup>1</sup> Yes, in the right mood, and on the right kind of day, in the right place, our relationships right with our fellows, we have all felt like that. Given health of body, mind, and spirit; given youth and joyous high spirits, and contact with the wind on the heath instead of, say, a slum street, an evil-smelling factory, a stuffy office, the sickly-sweet horror of an operating theatre, or the smell of the London Underground Railway, we can say 'Amen' to George Borrow. There *are* moments about which, in sincerity, we can shout with Wordsworth:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.

Though even the young, if they stop to think, or stumble on pain in the life of one dear to them, find it increasingly hard to tuck everything into the 'life is sweet' philosophy.

For those of us in the second half of life, there are still many moments when our hearts echo George Borrow's words, but they would be a very untrue label of life as a whole. For children yes, but does God really mean it to be so for adults?

Let me make a personal confession. In earlier years I believed that God intended man to be happy in the ordinary sense of the word: free from pain, free from psychological disharmony, which is mental pain, free from insecurity and want and hunger and cold; that God wanted man to have all the things man wants for himself, and that the word 'providence' connoted the loving generosity

<sup>1</sup> *Lavengro*, George Borrow, p. 168 (Dent).

with which God poured out what we call the 'good' things upon His children. I laboured mentally, as Milton puts it—

~ To justify the ways of God to men.

I sought to prove that when evil does befall, it comes through ignorance, folly, or sin, either in ourselves or in the great human family to which we are so closely bound that, while we joyously receive its assets, we cannot escape its liabilities. Thus the corporate effects of ignorance and folly and sin are visited on the individual in the form of what he calls 'evil'.

I knew that God was always eager to replace ignorance with knowledge, folly with wisdom, and sin with holiness, and therefore I argued—and still think I argued truly—that the fruit of ignorance and folly and sin could not be God's intention for His children, and were not to be regarded as His 'will' in the commonly accepted use of the word.

I now feel that in thus thinking I failed to emphasize sufficiently an important fact, viz., that God *ordained* our slow schooling from ignorance to knowledge, from folly to wisdom, from sin to holiness, and that He *ordained* the family basis of life by which we suffer through others. He may not have willed suffering in the sense of intending it, but He certainly willed the circumstances in which suffering is pretty certain for most of us. Only a few lucky ones escape.

And are they really lucky? I have just used the word 'schooling'. When I was at school I heard of boys who, for some reason or another, escaped school. How lucky I thought them! But now I don't think they were lucky. For they had to learn later when it was harder to learn, or else, if they repudiated the discipline of learning at all, they suffered permanent loss. I wonder if that is true spiritually. If by the interplay of circumstances we escape the school of suffering, does it mean that we have to learn later when it is harder to learn, or does it mean that, if even that is avoided, we suffer permanent loss? I am probably not speaking to anybody over thirty-five who has not experienced something in the way of physical or mental suffering, and I think if I could ask you the

question, now that the suffering has passed, whether you wish it had been avoided, you would say that you are glad that you passed through it. For as the French proverb says: '*Souffrir passe; avoir souffert ne passe jamais*,' 'To suffer, passes away, but to have suffered, never passes.' The gain of the experience is ours for ever.

Ought the word 'providence', then, to be enlarged to include those ways of God with His children which *seem* evil, but which promote their highest good? Health, success, material blessings, family happiness, the love of friends, the approval of the community, these we call the good things. 'In the providence of God' is a phrase we use when we have received the good and escaped what we call the evil things—sorrow and suffering, bereavement, frustration, poverty, disappointment, and disease. But a thought rises in my mind that will not be suppressed. If the goodness of God to His children is only to be measured by His ability to secure for them what we call the 'good' things, then He is strangely unsuccessful in His efforts, for there is probably not one life lived on this planet since life began but which—if lived out to maturity—has undergone a certain degree of suffering. Further, those who have most faithfully done the will of God and whom we think of as being most like Him, seem to have received less 'good' things and more 'evil' things than the average. And He who perfectly loved God, believed in God, taught the Fatherhood of God and trusted God, was rewarded with the desertion of all His friends, horrible torture, a shameful, revolting death and the apparent failure of all His plans. Yet so far from railing against the failure of God's goodness, He leads all the saints in asserting the goodness and fatherhood of God, and even in the hour of His keenest pain He gave an unmistakable 'Yea' and 'Amen' to all God's dealing with Him.

After much thought, then, and helped immensely as I have long been by soaking my mind in Dr. John Oman's books,<sup>1</sup> I have

<sup>1</sup> Particularly *Grace and Personality*, *Vision and Authority* and *The Paradox of the World* (Cambridge University Press).

come to see how unsatisfactory, and indeed false, my earlier view of providence was, and that God not only *allows* evil things to happen to His children but puts them into a school, the circumstances of which make suffering almost certain. I see now that God's loving providence is not more manifested in those good things which He loves to give us than it is in those evil things which He allows. I am to avoid evil if I can honourably do so. I am to oppose evil because it is evil and causes suffering to God and man. But concerning the evil that I must endure, either because it is inescapable or because I cannot honourably avoid it, I am to believe that *it can minister to my soul's final good (=blessedness) no less positively and powerfully, but often more so, than the things I call good.*

A true reaction to the good things of life must be *possible*. That is to say, my reaction to them must be *capable* of inciting me to make spiritual progress. 'How often would I have gathered you,' says Jesus, 'but ye would not!'<sup>1</sup> 'If thou hadst known . . .' but 'thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.'<sup>2</sup> God *desired* the right reaction to His 'good' gifts and men *might* have responded. When the good things fail to bring the right reaction, He uses evil things. But God cannot possibly *need* evil and depend on it to bring good to the soul. When, however, the appeal of His beneficence fails, He uses the evil which the soul brings on itself, or which others bring upon it, and through it can achieve as great a good. The good things of life may make me thankful and glad, and I may express my humble gratitude in the happy service of a son. But the good things of life may make me complacent, smug, self-satisfied, and slothful. In a book I was recently reading, I came across this sentence: 'The Carthaginians had wealth beyond the dreams of avarice together with a commerce which made them masters of the Mediterranean, yet, in the sequel, they became the mere puppets of a soulless splendour and ultimately they were crushed beneath their weight of golden circumstance.' And in another, Arnold Toynbee points out in a chapter called 'The Stimulus of Blows' that power and success have always been won by the inhabitants of what he calls 'hard countries', not by the

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xix. 42-4.

dwellers in earthly paradises. The same kind of thing happens in the case of individuals. It is the 'good' things that bring them down. On the other hand, while the evil things of life may make me hostile, resentful, and angry, they may also make me respond in terms of heroism, courage, and patience, in such a way as to deepen my character to an extent which unbroken ease could hardly achieve. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how a quality like heroism or courage could be evoked from the human soul in circumstances which made no demand for either.

If this seems a difficult thought, let us ask ourselves one very simple question. Have the good things of life produced the good people? My observation and reading lead me to say 'No'. The evil things have been the occasion of the goodness of the saints. Does any one find the finest characters amongst those who have suffered the least? Is it not a strange thing that we all long for the good things, and yet our pulpit illustrations, taken from biography, are stories of men and women whose splendid characters have been achieved because they were denied the good things? From their reaction to the evil things, they have hewn, out of the hard stone of misfortune, characteristics which we love to hold up to others and to ourselves in dark hours.

Here are a few examples written down at random. Catherine Booth in the last year of her life said she could not remember one day free from pain. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote stories of heroism while tuberculosis had him by the throat. Helen Keller was blind and deaf from birth. Henry Martyn, the Indian missionary, fought consumption of the lungs, whilst carrying on evangelistic work in incredibly difficult circumstances. St. Theresa endured unending headaches, accompanied by fever and subsequently paralysis. Sir Walter Scott was incurably lame. George Matheson was incurably blind. Beethoven was incurably deaf. Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Society of Jesus, was in life-long pain. Pascal reported that he had been in pain from his eighteenth year to the year of his death. Cowper and Samuel Johnson suffered from what now would be called chronic anxiety



neurosis. They were both in daily fear of insanity. . . . And so we might lengthen the list down to present days, including our dear friend the late Dick Sheppard, making laborious journeys to visit those in trouble, and speaking, as I have heard him speak in my own pulpit, though choking with asthma and in continuous physical distress.

Must we not, then, relinquish the thought that God's providence involves only His beneficence, and realize that facing the things we call evil is also part of His plan for us and part of His schooling of us? Let me reiterate that this does not mean He *will* evil. God cannot will evil, but He allows it and uses it as the occasion of our education. We can see this difference in one very simple picture. When a child is learning to walk his parents will *allow* him to tumble. They do not restrict his adventures to the limits of a padded cell, but they do not *will* that he shall tumble or they would push him over.

There are two strong reasons why we must relinquish the false thought that providence means only beneficence. (1) The first is that to retain it is going to mean for us bewilderment and confusion of mind if suffering overtakes us, as at some time it probably will. We shall think that God has deserted us, or that He does not exist, or that He has forgotten to be gracious, or else we shall ask silly questions, 'Why has God allowed this?' and we shall make foolish statements, such as, 'I shan't believe in God any more'. Nor will such doubts as then assail us be removed by supposing that God cannot prevent evil from happening to us, or that He puts jam, like endurance, fortitude, and patience, into the bitter mixture which evil makes us swallow. Both such suggestions imply that evil is stronger than He is. It is a poor faith which believes that evil can do terrifying things to us and that all God can do is to help us bear them bravely. (2) The second strong reason why we must relinquish the false view of providence is that only when the false view goes can the true view take possession of our minds and hearts. And the true view, I repeat, is that God can use evil for our final good as powerfully as He can use good; partly

because of the way He Himself reacts to evil, i.e. by suffering love, and partly because of the way we can react to evil. That reaction must not be fatalism—'This is God's will'. No evil is that. Nor must it be thought that God is angry—'Thus God punishes me'. That statement requires much investigation. I am convinced that the right reaction is, 'What does God wish me to learn from this experience? What message is He signalling to me by means of this pain?' I should like to illustrate that by an experience I had on Clapham Junction Station before the war. I forget how many platforms there are at this station, but there seemed an immense number of signals, green lights and red, yellow, and purple and blue. They were confusing and bewildering to me, but an engine-driver could sit calmly in his engine and drive through the station because those lights, so confusing to me, were a message to him. Many illustrations will occur to you. An airman signalling in Morse by flashing lights from his plane produces in my mind only confusion, but to one who can read the Morse code, the lights convey a message.

Now, meaningless pain, I am certain, does not exist. I think it drives the mind to a panic that borders on madness to contemplate the possibility of lonely, meaningless, useless anguish and pain. To suppose that the pain of one child is a lost and pointless experience is to accept a comment on the meaning and nature of the universe that is terrifying in its implications. I admit how difficult it often is to read the message, to understand what God is saying, but if we are patient with Him, He will reveal it to us. And the action, reaction, and interaction between God and suffering and ourselves can bring us where God wants us to be and it is God's purpose to use evil to that end.

We are *called* into that co-operation because thus His purposes are forwarded. That word 'called' reminds me of the call-boy at the theatre who taps on the dressing-room door and tells the actor that he must now proceed to the stage to work out the plot a little farther towards that completion which was in the mind of the author. So the 'call' of God is the tap on the door that summons

us to work out our part in that eternal plot which is His purpose, and 'to them that love God all things—including the evil things—work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose'.<sup>1</sup> But before this higher faith can be ours, faith in providence regarded as mere beneficence must go. Only when we have parted with the false can we develop a faith which makes us big enough to receive every conceivable evil, without allowing it to part us from the sense of God's love and the certainty of His care. I repeat once more that the fact that evil is allowed by God means that it is as friendly to our final good as are those things which we regard as desirable.

The meaning of a verse in Robert Bridges' poem, 'January', eluded me for some time, but in this context it lives:

And God the Maker doth my heart grow bold  
To praise for wintry works not understood,  
Who all the worlds and ages doth behold,  
Evil and good as one, and all as good.

Now, all this has an immense bearing on the question whether life is a good thing. If material good is the aim of life, let us cynically plan our lives accordingly. But if the whole universe exists for spiritual ends, obviously the only 'good' is that which secures those ends, and if *this* be true, it must be admitted that a lot of people are wasting their time. For their whole energies are set on securing what we call the 'good' things of life, and they deny any possible value to the things which by common consent are labelled 'evil'.

When people ask whether life is a good thing, one wants to ask the next question, 'Good for what?' We have been thinking much lately about the coal-miners working deep in the earth. Is it a good thing that a man, for whatever pay, should work for hours and hours, often lying prone, working, as I have watched him work at the coal face, in dust and noise and heat and darkness? It is not a good thing in itself. It is only good in the perspective of the war effort and the needs of industry and the warmth of our homes.

<sup>1</sup> Romans viii. 28.

That is to say, coal-mining is not good in itself. It is only good for something else seen later. In the same way, what is the good of ploughing the ground? Why the toil and sweat and trouble of forcing that immense knife through the soil? It is only good in the light of something that comes afterwards, viz. the harvest. What is the good of a man breaking stones by the roadside? What is the advantage of spending all that labour and energy to make big stones into little stones? None at all, save in the light of subsequent buildings or roads or cement. Otherwise breaking stones has no more value than tearing up bits of paper, as one may see a mental patient doing, in the corner of a mental hospital.

Is life good? Not, I think, in itself, except at rare moments when we sing with George Borrow and his school. But I am not in any doubt whatever that it is 'good' in the light of something else which lies beyond it, and *I do not mean heaven*. I mean the making of a character capable of communion with God, and that goal is His glory, our blessedness, and the only thing that will make heaven heaven. I am certain that this point of view is the right one, and that if pleasure were the test of life's worthwhileness, life hardly passes the test—it certainly doesn't for many—and we shall never come to terms with life by supposing that it *ought* to bring us pleasure. But life is 'good' in the sense that it is good for something and not good for nothing.

As I see the matter, it is only this truth which justifies a good God in allowing evil to be of such appalling dimensions, power, and influence in His world. He could not justify it by merely following it with good, mixing it with good, or by trying to make up to a person in some heavenly life for the fact that his earthly life had been filled with evil. 'Your sorrow shall be *turned into joy*'—not merely followed by joy. God can only justify the widespread presence of evil by using evil, as truly as He can use good, for something beyond themselves. Faith insists that, in fact, this is what God does. That as man uses ploughing and coal-mining and stone-breaking for something beyond themselves, and as we all value our own schooling for that to which it led, God can use

evil as the raw material by which He and man together make man's character such an amazingly wonderful thing that it can enter into communion with the Divine and find its blessedness therein. This is life's highest crown, life's final justification, and life's ultimate goal. From the schooling demanded for this great end we shirk. 'Let me be alone,' we cry to God, 'I only want to be happy.' How similar it is to the cry of a child: 'I don't want to go to school.' But we are not here to be happy. We are here to glorify God through a character which has been schooled in such a way that it finds its joy in communion with Him. If He left us alone in the elementary, unschooled state which we call happiness, it could only mean that He did not think we were worth bothering about. In such a state He has left the birds. Sons can be taken farther.

It is only in the light of the theme which I have tried to work out in this sermon that I can understand the inwardness of some words spoken to me years ago by one who is still very dear to me, and who died of cancer after three years of suffering. About her, a ministerial friend of mine has lately written this:<sup>1</sup> 'I wonder if I ever told you of what your sister's ministry meant to me. She would be astonished if she knew (perhaps she does). I often went to see her during her long illness, and sometimes went from Manchester on purpose. I can never forget my last visit: it was about a fortnight before she went. We had two hours together, and she was full of fun and laughter and a wonderful anticipation. I could repeat to-day some of the very words she said. *She was like a child going home for Christmas.* I never knew any one who more completely and literally "ran up with joy the shining way". Her influence has lived with me all through the years.'

When I myself went to see her shortly after she had received news that recovery was humanly speaking impossible, she was in a Liverpool nursing home. It was a dark, dull November afternoon, but when I went into her room I can only say that it was just as though someone had lighted a beautiful lamp. Nobody had really

<sup>1</sup> Rev. T. H. Barratt, B.A., my former and greatly loved tutor, in a letter dated December 1, 1943.

done so, but the glory in her face seemed to illumine the whole room. I suppose she saw the dismay in my own, because she said, 'Don't be troubled at the news. Everything that you preach is perfectly true.' And then she added a sentence that is written on my heart in gold for ever: '*I am proud to be trusted with cancer.*' Now what do you make of that? 'I am proud to be trusted with it.' Not that she did not fight it. Cancer is not the intention of God. Those who fight it do His will. She fought it and lost physically in the battle against it. She fought it because it is an evil thing, and brings pain to God and to men. But let me put it in this way. When the grey messenger of cancer knocked on the door of her life, she answered the door and confronted the messenger. She did not turn away and run from him, or seek to hide from him, or cry out in anguish that she could not be asked to face this. Rather she asked for the messenger's credentials, and, while she looked through them, she found that the permit of God was attached to them. God did not will it, but God had allowed it, and that was enough for her. And by the time it had won a victory over her body, her soul was more than conqueror through Him who could use even cancer to bring her where He wanted her to be, to make her soul greater than ever and to express His own glory in a human life. In that way she came to terms with life. Her philosophy of providence was not one which welcomed and enjoyed the good things, and was puzzled, bewildered, or defeated because the evil things had so great a scope. What we call the evil things did not deny the nature, much less the existence, of God: They were God's servants and were allowed to enter human life because in the end they were made to do His work and serve Him in as true a sense as were the good things. When cancer confronted her, the call-boy tapped on her door and told her that it was her turn now, on the difficult stage of human suffering, to further the Divine purpose and work out the Divine plan, and when the curtain comes down we shall be speechless with wonder, for the plot is grander than man dares to dream. 'To them that love God all things—the good things *and the evil things*—work together for good, to them that are *called* according to His

purpose.' Paul had the right to say that. He had experienced the good things and the bad things. He knew how to abound and how to be abased. In one city, Lystra, he was taken for a god and then almost immediately stoned and flung out of the city like dead carrion. Two verses farther on we read of his reaction. 'They [Paul and his companions] returned to Lystra . . . confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and that through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God.'<sup>1</sup>

Yes, and he had the right to say to the Galatians: 'From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus.'<sup>2</sup> Those marks were made by evil men for an evil purpose, but Paul knew that God used evil for His good: that He used 'all things' in fact. Are we watching a proud man, who had been taken for a god, saved from pride by the blows *inflicted* by unfriendly men, but *used* by a friendly Saviour? With awe in our heart and a strange hush in our spirit we hear these wounds, caused by evil men, called 'the marks of JESUS'. We can only square our shoulders and try to follow Paul, and the other saints of God through the ages, with a faith that sees in the sway of evil the controlling hand of Him who 'maketh even the wrath of man to praise Him'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiv. 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians vi. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm lxxvi. 10.

## THE LONELY GREATNESS OF THE WORLD

(A Good Friday Sermon)

Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me (*John xvi. 32*).

As I speak to you this morning about the loneliness of Christ, I would ask you not to try to react to it in terms of pity. I would like to be able to show you the loneliness of Christ as something essential to His greatness—the lonely greatness of the world—as something majestic, as something endured for us, as something which we cannot rightly see in all its significance for us if our reaction is one of pity.

I am afraid the pulpit has often mistakenly represented Jesus. At Christmas-time we hear a sermon on the text, 'There was no room for Him in the inn', and people are deliberately invited to register pity for the tiny baby for whom no hospitality could be found, and they are asked to find Him room in their hearts. We preach sermons on the text, 'He had not where to lay His head', and His loneliness is used to make an appeal to the emotions of the hearers that they should, as it were, take pity upon Him and offer their hearts for His home. We preach sermons on the text, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock', and the preacher can make a tender, beautiful, and true picture of that lowly Suppliant pleading to be let in.

There is some truth in these word pictures, but not much, for it must be remembered that He who descended to be the Saviour of the world, and who entered life as a tiny baby, was 'very God of very God'. He who had not where to lay His head must again and again have been offered hospitality, and He who stands at the door and knocks is the King of kings, and His invitation is a royal one. I find it hard to believe that the early Church ever



offered people sermons in which the hearers were invited to 'let Christ in'. Their language is rather as follows: 'God hath put all things in subjection under His feet and given Him to be head over all things to the church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.'<sup>1</sup> 'He must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet.'<sup>2</sup> 'God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'<sup>3</sup>

So, as we contemplate to-day His agony and suffering, thinking this morning of His loneliness, this afternoon, in terms of music, of His Crucifixion, and again to-night at St. Martin-in-the-Fields as we think of the message of His Cross for us to-day, I would ask you to banish pity. Let the thought in our minds be of a loneliness which He undertook as an expression of His own endless love for us, a loneliness inseparable from the greatness of His task, and endured, not to win from us our pity, but our adoration of the endless love of God which alone can provide the courage we need in these dark days to live victoriously ourselves.

One of the recitatives which will be expressed in Stainer's beautiful music this afternoon begins with the words, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger.'<sup>4</sup> I am making no criticism of the music, but I would remind you that the words are nothing whatever to do with Jesus. They were written about a siege which took place nearly six hundred years before Christ, when Jerusalem was threatened by the aggressive tyranny of Babylon. Jerusalem is personified in this Lamentation of Jeremiah, and the city is crying out in its agony and pleading for pity. These words have been taken from that setting and attached to the Master, but they are as different as anything could possibly be from His spirit. Certain of our hymns unfortunately

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians i. 22, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Philippians ii. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians xv. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Lamentations of Jeremiah i. 12.

sound the same note. They are becoming rarer, but one still hears the note:

All this I did for thee,  
What hast thou done for Me?

When we turn from pity-provoking sentimentality to the strong, virile language of the Gospels, we hear what Jesus actually did say. To the women who wept and mourned and beat their breasts on Good Friday we hear Him say, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me'.<sup>1</sup>

There is a comment on all this in one of the sermons of F. W. Robertson, of Brighton, who was himself a very lonely man, a man who could write of himself as follows: 'I shall be alone as my Master was. I am hated by some who loved me once, not for what I do, but for what I think. I have long foreseen it. And, knowing that the Father is with me, I am not afraid to be alone, though, to a man not ungentle made, there is some sharpness in the thought. . . . I am alone now and shall be till I die, but I am not afraid to be alone in the majesty of darkness which His presence peoples with a crowd. . . . A sublime feeling of a Presence comes about me at times which makes inward solitariness a trifle to talk about.'<sup>2</sup> Such a man has the right to preach to people on the loneliness of Christ, and in a sermon on this theme we find these words: 'There is a feeble and sentimental way in which we speak of Christ. We turn to the Cross, the agony and the loneliness to touch the softer feelings, to arouse compassion. You degrade that loneliness by your compassion. Compassion, compassion for Him! Adore if you will, but no pity.'

You will not misunderstand my saying that there is a real psychological danger as soon as we begin to allow ourselves to have pity for Christ, because what happens is that we begin to pity ourselves, although devoutly supposing that our pity is for Him.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson*, Vol. 2, p. 99, Vol. 1, pp. 187-8.

<sup>3</sup> This point is worked out by Professor H. H. Farmer, *The Healing Cross*, p. 192.

If you have been to a funeral, not to the funeral of one very dear to you, but the kind of funeral one sometimes attends in order to pay respect to the dead, you may often have suspected that the tears of some so-called mourners are not for the dead at all. By a self-motivated projection, they are really weeping for themselves. They are saying to themselves, 'How sad it will be when I come to die and people stand round and weep for me!' I think the tears at some weddings have a similar origin. When the bride's mother weeps it may be because she is losing her daughter and is therefore sad. But I feel certain that often her mental processes are rather these: 'How sad a thing my own marriage has become.' She is weeping over the broken pieces of what was once a lovely ideal.

Pity is not a very positive and constructive emotion in any case, but *self-pity* is one of the most disintegrating emotions in which personality can indulge, and the one can depreciate into the other without our consciously realizing it. Once we begin to pity Christ we do Him a disservice, since it is the last thing He asks from us. A great soul does not want his personality pitied. He wants his cause supported, his example followed, and the tasks completed which he has been unable to finish. But we are in a worse plight than ever if pity for Him becomes pity for ourselves, and it is so easy subconsciously to fall into the subtle psychological morass in which the mental processes run like this. Christ was alone, I am often lonely; Christ was rejected, I am unpopular with people; Christ was misunderstood, I am often misunderstood; Christ's worth was never recognized, I myself am underrated; Christ was persecuted, I am persecuted; until, unaware of what has happened, we are not weeping for Him, but for ourselves, and we are the less able to see Him because really we are looking only at ourselves.

Did you hear last Sunday's Postscript on the wireless? Did you hear Admiral Evans talking about Scott, his leader to the Antarctic? Do you recollect the manly, virile, majestic note that Admiral Evans sounded? I thought it was one of the most wonderful broadcasts I had ever heard. You were made to feel with great intensity the difficulties and dangers of the expedition, and the

courage and tenacity of those who undertook it. But there was no pity, no sob-stuff, no tears. You were not invited to look at Evans; you were invited to look at Scott, and although the hardship and the suffering were perfectly described, instead of pity, one felt a kind of pride that one belonged to the same race. The proud grandeur of the sacrifice stood out.

It was thus that the disciples saw Jesus. It was thus that they spoke about Him. I hope you have realized how restrained are the adjectives about Him. The Gospels never say: 'Jesus gave a moving address and great numbers of the congregation were deeply affected.' The kind of language used is illustrated by four words: 'He went into Galilee.' They do not stay to tell you that that means Jesus went into the area where John the Baptist was arrested for the same kind of 'propaganda', and that Jesus said the kind of thing for which John had been beheaded. 'He must needs pass through Samaria,' we read. But there was no need at all. Every other traveller would have taken a great deal of trouble to avoid that dangerous road when tension was as high between Jews and Samaritans as it was in Jesus's day. This unsentimental restraint is typical of the Gospel writers.

Though they themselves, by their own story, involve themselves in reproach, they show Him to us in lonely greatness, the lonely greatness of the world. He must have longed to win the religious leaders of His day. He coveted their support. When they turned away, gathered in dark corners and plotted His death, *He went on*. It must have been heartbreaking to Jesus that He fell foul of His own family. No loneliness is so bitter as that which assails the heart of him who finds hostility without and misunderstanding at home. There are no human means left to give his soul its sense of needful security. But though His family openly let it be thought that they considered Him mad, *He went on*. There is no doubt that He longed, and for a time expected, to win the populace, but our eyes light on this sentence: 'After this many walked no more with Him.' *But He went on*. One of the saddest passages in the New Testament has been spoilt in its effectiveness by an unsatisfactory way of dividing the text of the

Fourth Gospel into verses and chapters. The last verse of chapter seven of St. John's Gospel is part of the first verse of the eighth chapter. Reading them together, we find these words: 'They went every man unto his own house: but Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.' You could hardly find a sentence indicating more definitely the loneliness of Jesus. *But still He went on.* In the Garden of Gethsemane, in the hour of His greatest need, we read this bleak sentence: 'They all forsook Him and fled.' *But He went on.* On the very night before His death, His disciples quarrelled. In the Garden of Agony they slept. When He wanted friendship more than at any moment of His life, they had scattered in the shadows about His Cross.

And when He walked along the Via Dolorosa to be crucified, there was not one person in the whole world who approved of His action. The religious leaders chuckled; He was in the net now. The politicians were glad; they had feared a rising of the people, and a triumphant declaration by Jesus Himself of both His position and His power. The disciples thought He was mad. Why didn't He use His supernatural power? The people thought He had been found out. There was not one person in the whole world who approved.

It is probably impossible for us to do more than glimpse such a loneliness. Geographical loneliness is a terrible thing. I have read that, in the remote parts of Norway, amongst the deep fjords, where precipices rise hundreds of feet sheer from the sea, a sailor dare not leave his wife for very long in a tiny homestead alone amongst the mountains. The majesty of those unchanging hills, the horror of the precipices, the awful storms that sweep the coast, have frequently robbed the lonely of their sanity. I wonder if even Admiral Evans could have stood the test of the Antarctic wastes if he had been all alone. What did Mallory and Irving feel on the top of Everest, where, according to the native tradition, devils sported with the lives of men who attempted to force their way into those silent solitudes? It was the awful loneliness that Commander Byrd found it hardest to bear. We recall the lines from *The Ancient Mariner*:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
 Alone on a wide, wide sea. . . .  
 So lonely 'twas that even God  
 Scarce seemed there to be.

But if it is terrifying to be geographically lonely, to go where man has never set foot before, to climb where strange things happen, where water boils and is not hot, where no dear, familiar landmarks comfort the spirit, where possibly it is dark for nine months of the year, or where the northern sky is shot through and through, sometimes, with queer lights that startle and frighten, what must it be to penetrate spiritually where no soul has ever been before? 'He descended into hell.' We do not know what the men meant who wrote that down, but I think they were trying to say something of what I am trying to say to you. There are no words to express the utter loneliness of spirit. Where was Jesus when He said: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' No one knows. He had gone beyond our power to follow Him even in the most daring flights of imagination. He was the lonely greatness of the world.

We can learn something precious from Christ's loneliness.

1. The loneliness of the Master was something He faced for us. He who had dwelt in the bosom of the Father, in a relationship which met His every need, gave it up to be limited, lonely, and outcast on this bleak planet we call our earth. It was part of the sacrifice of the Cross. And it was faced not by one who was a calm Stoic, hardening Himself against love—such a person, if he exists at all, is a psycho-pathological case—it was met by a warm-hearted Man who longed for friendship and love. He was the more sensitive in regard to His need for love than we can know because He longed to give love to an extent we cannot measure, and he who longs to give, longs to receive. His loving heart must have been wounded again and again by the cold, sterile, callous attitude not only of His enemies, but of those He expected to become His friends.

We notice something further. He refused to buy love, and so made His loneliness greater. Jesus *need not* have been one who had nowhere to lay His head. Hundreds of homes would have been

open to Him. Popular preachers can generally find a meal, a bed and a chat. People who can heal others need not be alone unless they want to be alone, and He could have been, and for a time was, all that. Dr. Farmer says that 'one of the greatest tests of character is whether a man is ready to alienate the people who love him in order to bless them'. 'When life is crying out for fellowship, it is the hardest thing in the world deliberately to pursue a course which you know will, for the time being, destroy it. . . . Jesus wanted these men's fellowship with Himself, wanted it more than our egotistic natures can ever conceive, but He knew that there was one thing He must not do to purchase it, and that was to tamper with the truth.'

That longing to break loneliness by winning the approval of others is clearly set forth in the life of Florence Nightingale. Sir Edward Cook writes of her thus: 'Florence felt that everything she said or did was a subject of vexation to her sister, a disappointment to her mother, a worry to her father. In one of her letters home, when at last, and not until she had reached her thirtieth birthday, the way was opening up for her, she writes to her mother: "I should be as happy here as the day is long if I could hope that I had your smile, your blessing, your sympathy, without which I cannot be quite happy. . . . Give me time, give me faith, trust me, help me. I feel within me that I could gladden your loving hearts which now I wound." But the appeal fell on deaf ears.'

Jesus understood that situation. Through His loneliness, He did something for us, and let us realize that we should have been robbed of that something if His extremity of loneliness had driven Him to pay the price which would have bought the comfort of those who could have given Him friendship in return.

2. The second lesson we may learn is that there is a right kind of loneliness and a wrong kind. There is a right kind of loneliness because loneliness can bring us into a situation in which alone God can deal with us. There are some things He cannot say to us unless we are prepared to be alone.

I find that I have to say this to myself again and again. I must be willing to come apart even from the people I love. If we insist

always on having our admirers round us, always flying, when trouble and criticisms come to us, to those who are sure to say kind and comforting things, who will protect us by their affection and heal our wounds by their friendship, then there will be some things that God can never get into our hearts. There is something the matter with the person who will never be alone. That 'something the matter' might be a psychological illness, and if, this morning, I am speaking to someone suffering from a neurosis, let me say at once that this does not apply to you. You ought to have friendship and sympathy until you are better. But, illness of body and mind apart, there is definitely something wrong with the person who dare not be alone, and he would be wise to face the situation. I think you will know what I mean. The kindness of others can obscure our sins from ourselves. Our friends can be such a protection to us that even God cannot get near us. Our friends will say, 'Well, you didn't mean to be unkind', or 'I don't think you should worry about that'. Our friends will blacken our enemies and whitewash us, and they have no conscious motive in the matter other than kindness. Subconsciously, they are using our hunger for comfort to creep farther into our affection. Men who admire us sometimes do so to such an extent that the ethical situation, with its sharply contrasted blacks and whites, is blurred into a grey; and women, bless them! are worse; they will so minister to us out of their affection and loving friendship that they will lose all sense of ethical justice and call people who criticize us all sorts of names, not because of their sins, but just because they dare to criticize us. I am afraid it is true that God wants some of us to be much more lonely much more often, so that we may see ourselves as He sees us, remembering with George Fox that 'the light that shows us our sins is the light that heals us'.

There is a place for comfort, a time for sympathy, of course, but also there is a time to be alone, even when for us the shadow of the Cross falls on our lives, that we may ask God and learn from Him all that He would teach us from the experiences we are called upon to go through. Let me write down a sentence about the Master which has often been in my mind: 'He went up into a mountain



apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone.<sup>1</sup> Through the loneliness of the Cross, He achieved a victory which the comfort of friends might have denied Him to our everlasting loss.

3. But there is a kind of loneliness that is not right for us, and all I can say this morning to people here who are lonely in that way is that you must take your loneliness to Christ, so that He may tell you what to do with it and thus end its overplus.

And I am not thinking only of the conventional example of loneliness: the person who has recently come up to this great, lonely city, or the person newly joined the Forces, or in some strange job. I am remembering also that the mother of a big family can be very lonely, especially as her brood grows up and becomes independent. The individual member of a family can be horribly lonely, especially if he feels odd or out of it or a failure. Loneliness can even be emphasized by the physical presence of others, even others of friendly disposition, especially when one is bowed down by inward perplexity or secret grief or hidden frustration. Even marriage does not dispel loneliness if love 'has turned to kindness' or, worse, to tolerance.

But this I have seen: Loneliness, to which the right reaction is made, can become a wonderful qualification for helping others, and in such a ministry its poignancy is ended. Perhaps that is Christ's word to some who are here under the shadow of His Cross this morning. One thing I must add, in His name: We must never let loneliness drive us in on ourselves so that we descend to self-pitying or eating out our own heart in bitterness. Beware of that dangerous, vicious circle which runs like this. Loneliness can make you bitter and bitterness makes you more lonely, for no one wants to associate with people who are bitter. Loneliness can make you jealous and jealousy can make you lonely, for no one wants a jealous person as his friend. Loneliness can make you odd and then oddness can make you lonely, for people fight shy of those who have lost their sense of humour. Only Christ, I think, can break that vicious circle with the offer of His eternal friendship,

<sup>1</sup>Matthew xiv. 23.

and if you take your loneliness to Him, it can become a qualification by which you can help others and you will lose your own loneliness because you become one who is positively offering friendship. Let him who wants a friend become a friend. I have noticed in my own ministry that those who are most able to help others are those who, in the depths of their spirit, have known what it is to be lonely. That is one reason why Jesus helps us so much.

Once, when I was little more than a boy, I remember getting lost on the Scottish hills. It was almost dark and the high mountains were frightening. Then I found a little stream and knew, of course, that it must run to a river. Following the stream I found the river, and on the bank of the river was the village I sought. Through the wild mental country of the past, amongst all the confusing, bewildering thoughts man has had about God in this great, frightening universe, there ran the stream of the friendship of God. Enoch walked with God. Abraham was the friend of God. 'I am with thee', was the message to Moses. 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil', said David, 'for Thou art with me.' See the stream running through the mountains as man made quest for God! And the stream of God's friendliness led to the great river of Divine love seen in the life and passion and death of Christ. Dark may be the night before us, terrifying the mountains, shadowed valleys may be our experience, the power of evil may terrify us, the darkness of doubt and fear seem almost overwhelming. But keep near the little stream of God's friendship till it brings you to the river of Divine love, and then you will find that you can say with Jesus: 'I am not alone for the Father is with me.'

## THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself

(Mark xii. 31; Matthew xix. 19; Leviticus xix. 18.)

THOU shalt love! We stop there! Our minds at first reject the words for they seem to contradict one another. Thou shalt! That is a command. A command is carried out by the will. We can bend our will to any task we are commanded to do. We may not succeed in it, but, at any rate, we can try.

But to say 'Thou shalt love' seems psychologically impossible. One cannot *love* to order. Surely love is an emotion and beyond the control of the will. Love rises up of itself without commandment or in defiance of commandment, or it isn't worth calling love. Who, indeed, would care to be the victim of someone's *commanded* love? Would it be the real thing? Would it have the quality of the 'divine emotion'?

Love, the theme of endless poets, artists and musicians, is the loveliest of all things that rise in the consciousness of man; the most perfect flower his personality produces. It doesn't render obedience to the will. It is called forth by the beauty and truth and love around it. I am not thinking only of the love of lovers, but the love of friends. In the presence of one who really loves us our minds find rest. Our best is called forth. Our ideals are shared. Wounds are not inflicted, they are healed. In the presence of the loved person by whom also we are beloved, we find the maximum happiness, the deepest content and a relationship entirely free from fear. Such love provides infinite resource against the blows of the hostile world outside, and, when the world has done its buffeting, such love is the harbour of the spirit into which it steals like a battered ship from the troubled waters outside, to be equipped, refitted and refuelled for the next voyage. Love is the gift of God, the sharing of His nature and the

finest quality of human personality. All this I think we mean when we use the word 'love'.

Surely, then, to say to a person, 'Thou shalt love', is almost to commit the crime of seeking to bind two things together which are incompatible. It is like putting together a sword and a rose, a tank and a sonata, a steam-roller and a little child's smile. The first compulsive, forceful, driven by the will. The second revealing a beauty born from above, kindled by a touch from God, breathing the very nature of the eternal world.

But the difficulty about our text is that it was *Jesus* who said, 'Thou shalt love': gave the commandment, indeed, high place, the second of all the commandments, and Jesus 'knew what was in man'. He issued no commands in themselves impossible, and, though we may say that the commandment runs back to the Mosaic Law, nevertheless Jesus underlined it, reiterated it, and by His words about it, gave it still greater authority.

We are driven, then, to suppose that the two are not incompatible, and, since we cannot escape the imperious command 'thou shalt', we must ask some very important questions as to what 'thou shalt love' in the New Testament sense really means.

The main answer to this question will be a discovery that to 'love' in the New Testament sense means a special way of directing the will. It does not mean that royal emotion we have been talking about. In a sense, it is a pity there isn't another word for it. For it must have confused many minds that Jesus should sanction the command, 'Thou shalt love'. I shall ask you to remember, and if necessary, to write down on the back of an envelope, this paraphrase of our text which I believe makes its meaning clearer: THOU SHALT ADOPT TOWARDS THY NEIGHBOUR A SUSTAINED DETERMINATION TO SHOW UNBREAKABLE GOODWILL IN ORDER THAT THE BEST QUALITIES IN THE PERSON 'LOVED' MAY BE CALLED FORTH.

We had better go on to define the word 'neighbour' also, and we shall remember that, when Jesus was asked the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' He promptly told the Jewish questioner a story about

a man who was his traditional enemy, a Samaritan. I suppose if our Lord were still physically present and a German asked, 'Who is my neighbour?' Jesus would tell him a story about a Jew, or an Englishman, or American, and if an Englishman asked, 'Who is my neighbour?' Jesus would tell a story about a German, an Italian, or a Jap. The meaning of the word 'neighbour', therefore, according to the teaching of Jesus, is *any one whom circumstance puts it in our power to befriend.*

Next week we will discuss the question of loving our enemies, because I can see that you are mentally asking me whether you are to be expected, even in this sense, to 'love' a Nazi. That we must leave till next week, but I would claim that in action you would prove to be much better than your words. People can express hate about Germans quite bitterly in words, but I am convinced that, if a German airman fell wounded or injured into their back garden, they would take him in and give him coffee and cakes before they rightly handed him over to the police. This has already been done.

Now let us turn to ask and try to answer the question—What is involved in 'loving' our neighbour? And here I must say something in brackets. Whenever I preach a sermon that I think is rather original; whenever I express ideas that I have never seen in print or heard expressed anywhere else, somebody always comes up after the service and says: 'Thank you very much for that sermon. *That is what I have always thought.*' Yet when one looks them in the eye, one knows that they are quite sincere. I think what happens is this. They mean that ideas which have been lying in their mind, and have never found articulate expression, have suddenly been clothed in words for them, to their great delight. I felt the same myself last Monday morning. Returning from a preaching appointment in Cambridge, I bought Mr. C. S. Lewis's last book, called *Christian Behaviour*. You can get it for two-and-six, and you could not spend half a crown to better advantage. But when I read it in the train I was pleased and annoyed at the same time. For he says so many things that I have thought for a long time! And if

now I say these things to you, you will accuse me of having cribbed them from Mr. Lewis. I can only ask you to be as tolerant of me as I sometimes have to be of you.

I want to offer you four points which I think are involved in 'loving' our neighbour—two negative and two positive.

1. It doesn't mean 'liking' our neighbour. Isn't that a relief? 'Liking' is something that cannot be compelled. We like a person or we don't like a person. Sometimes we like a person more if we know him better, but sometimes we like him less! I submit that it really would be impossible psychology to say: 'Thou shalt "like" thy neighbour.' Let me repeat, therefore, that the emotion called 'love' and the emotion of 'liking' are not in the discussion. We are not commanded to feel affection for another. It is the *will* that is to be engaged, the will to show unfailing goodwill. In the Christian sense, you can 'love' your neighbour without liking him, without having anything in common with him, and it would be only intellectual dishonesty to pretend to 'like' our neighbour, or to imagine that 'liking' could respond to a command.

2. Secondly, 'loving' our neighbour doesn't mean blinding ourselves to his faults. Obviously if the word 'neighbour' is to be understood in the sense defined—namely, any one whom circumstance puts it in our power to befriend—there may be very many things in the behaviour of our neighbour which call forth our definite condemnation, unless we are to lose our sense of ethical values. Supposing for a moment that we were thrust into the desperate situation of having to regard a Nazi as a 'neighbour'. We should be bound to hate the beastly things that were being done, but we should still be asked by Christ to 'love our neighbour'—namely, to show him a spirit of determined and sustained goodwill in order that his best qualities might find expression.

Receive, then, if you will, those two thoughts. Loving a neighbour does not mean necessarily 'liking' him, and it does not mean overlooking his faults. That is what the old Christian writers inferred, I think, when they told us that we must love the sinner,

even though we hate his sin. Here Mr. Lewis has for us a very apposite word. He says: 'For a long time I used to think this a silly straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man? But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life—namely, myself. However much I might dislike my own cowardice or conceit or greed, I went on loving myself. There had never been the slightest difficulty about it. In fact, the very reason why I hated these things was that I loved the man. Just because I loved myself I was sorry to find that I was the sort of man who did those things.'

Look back at our last two points in the light of that statement. We said 'loving' is not a matter of 'liking' and not a matter of blinding ourselves to faults. Isn't that exactly what we do about ourselves? Few of us, I imagine, really *like* ourselves. I find that, if I give an hour to honest introspection, I dislike myself for what I have done and for what I have been. Nor, I think, are most of us blind to our faults. We are blind to some of them because we only know ourselves so incompletely. We all have many blind spots. But the more we do know ourselves and the more we see our own faults, the more we regard them with a great loathing. Yet disliking ourselves, and conscious of our faults, we go on 'loving' ourselves in the sense defined. That is, we go on willing our own good. Moreover, we show a sustained determination in this matter, and nothing that happens, though we loathe it and hate it in ourselves, completely takes from us our belief in ourselves or makes us identify ourselves with the rotten things we do and are. The healthiness of this procedure is, I think, emphasized by our delight when, if we have been thoroughly bad-tempered, we overhear someone say, 'He isn't quite himself to-day'. We resent the thought of being identified with the meanness, unkindness, cruelty, and all the other kinds of unworthiness which we so frequently show.

Christ, therefore, is only asking that we shall do for others what we habitually do for ourselves—namely, refuse to identify them with the faults they exhibit, and adopt towards them that attitude

of goodwill which rebukes the faults far more powerfully than condemnation, and is the kind of moral sunshine in which the virtues are made to blossom. In other words, 'thou shalt love thy neighbour AS THYSELF'.

Now look at two positive things which loving our neighbour involves.

3. Our third point is that we must act *as if* we 'liked' our neighbour. This is not a contradiction of our earlier point that we must admit we do not 'like' him. Nor do I think it is a farce to try to act as though we liked him. When I search my own mind and examine my own attitudes to people I find this. If I act as though I did *not* like them, I like them still less and find 'loving' them in the Christian sense harder. If, on the other hand, I try to act as though I like them, I find I like them a little more and find 'loving' them in the Christian sense easier.

Let me hasten to explain that, by acting as though I liked my neighbour, I do not mean that kind of servile ingratiation for which I think the slang expression 'sucking up' is hard to bear. The man who 'sucks up' to another person is not setting out to love others. He is setting out to make others love him, and some will go to any lengths, even surrender their own ethical judgements, rather than oppose the views and feelings of a person whose goodwill they are seeking to win. 'Sucking up' is a neurotic symptom manifested either by those who have been starved of love, or those in whose nature childish fears of offending a grown-up person still sway their conduct even in mature years. 'Loving' one's neighbour is not servile ingratiation. It is the sustained determination to show goodwill, and such determination is bound logically to express itself in acts. The acts will reflect the determination, but they will, at the same time manufacture the emotion of liking. One might express it by looking at the opposite. Not to 'love' one's neighbour is to withhold goodwill. That increases the dislike and the dislike is likely to be expressed in deeds which still further deepen the dislike and turn it into hate. If you hate people you do yourself much harm. Indeed, more harm than you can do to the



person hated, and you will express the hate in cruelty and deepen the hate. In such an attitude you are widening the gulf between yourself and another, breaking the fellowship which it is God's plan to strengthen, and obviously you are landed in definite sin.

It is right to *hate* evil. No tepid disapproval is sufficient. It will not fire the energies of personality against that which must be ruthlessly fought. But let us not hate people. Let us believe in them. We only hate what evil people do because we have seen a better way of life. If we hate the people who do evil we shall never win them to doing differently; we shall antagonize them and make between us and them a gulf harder and harder to cross. Hate is a right reaction to evil but a wrong reaction to a person. To express the emotion of hate against evil is to purge the soul. To express the emotion of hate against a person is to poison the soul.

4. Our fourth point—the second positive one—is that we are helped to 'love' our neighbour by remembering how God loves us. The sooner we part with the thought that God loves us because we are worth loving, or because of our moral achievements, or because of any of our qualities, the better.

Have you ever looked round the crowded bus or tube in these days of restricted travelling, and amused yourself with the whimsical thought that God actually loves all those funny-looking people? One can hardly withhold the thought—What funny taste God must have! They do look such a queer lot, and, of course, we look the same to them. Whenever I look at a crowd—as I look at one now—I say to myself, 'What queer taste God must have to love every one of these people!' And there isn't a person here, or indeed anywhere, whom He does not love. But He doesn't love us because we are clever or beautiful, or have a good figure, or a good brain. He loves us because we belong to Him and because we are part of Him. Indeed, if I may break into the subject of to-night's sermon, His loving us is His only way of realizing His own God-ness. If He excluded you from His loving, He Himself would be incomplete. And in the two priceless parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, both sheep and coin are quite content to be lost. The picture is that of the person who owns them dismayed by

his or her sense of incompleteness, and the joy is the joy of a completeness recovered. God loves us as the poet or the artist loves that which he has himself created and which is part of himself.

We shall be helped to love others in the New Testament sense if we realize that God loves them, and, although God has the advantage over us in seeing perhaps lovable qualities in them which we cannot see, we are to act by faith where He acts by sight. And since we believe that there are lovable things deep in us (though the world may see few of them), we are to suppose that there are lovable things in everybody, and we are to act in such a way by sustained goodwill as to bring to obvious and glorious life the imprisoned splendours.

I love the familiar story of Michelangelo walking through the builder's yard and seeing in the corner a misshapen block of rough marble. When asked by the great sculptor what he was going to do with it, the builder said that it was useless. But Michelangelo made the famous reply: 'It certainly is not useless,' he said; 'send it round to my study. There is an angel imprisoned within it and I must set it free.' This will be the result of 'loving' our neighbour. Sustained determination to show unbreakable goodwill is rewarded at last, I believe, by our being allowed to see from the unpromising natures of other men and women like ourselves, the release of hidden beauty.

I have read somewhere that when they were making the Kingsway, which runs, as you know, between Southampton Row and Aldwych, the excavations were so deep for the immense buildings of that thoroughfare, that soil was thrown up to the surface which had not been exposed for many years. In that soil were seeds which, it is alleged, the Romans must have brought over with them. I did not know a seed could live so long. But, it is said, strange flowers bloomed in that upturned soil: flowers never seen in England before, though common enough in Rome. If the story is true it is another illustration of the kind of thing that happens when men love their neighbours.

As I was writing down these thoughts during the week, there

came to my memory the verse of an old hymn I had not heard since childhood. You may know it:

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,  
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore.  
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,  
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.

And with the memory of the verse came this most liberating thought: there is no quality in any of the greatest saints that is not present in every human life here this morning. Some qualities, perhaps, are as seeds. The state of development may be immature. Some may feel that the lovely things of life have become covered over, like the seeds under the Kingsway, by the bricks and mortar of materialism and even cynicism. But let me say it to you again. There is no quality exhibited in the lives of any of the saints that is not present, at least as possibility, in every human life. You may have a reputation\*for being all kinds of things which men despise, mean or gossip-loving, grabbing, conceited or unclean, but perhaps you have been guided here this morning to hear someone, himself a sinner, say to you in God's name that you are also much more than that.

The attitude of Jesus to men and women shows us how well He Himself fulfilled the command He lays upon us. Do you ask me to believe that Jesus 'liked' everybody? I wonder. With His insights He would see something to like which would elude us. But I believe He 'loved' everybody in the sense we have defined; that He would adopt towards every one a sustained determination to show goodwill, and that, in doing so, He would call forth their best. The flowers that had wilted and died, that seemed shrivelled up and withered for ever would bloom again for Him. To everybody else Matthew may have seemed a crusty old tax-gatherer, and Zacchaeus a mean little money-lender. Neither of them of any use to anybody. But, in both cases, deep under the soil were the seeds of saintliness. I wonder if Matthew knows to-day that in Church we read from the Gospel according to *Saint Matthew*. If so, I think he smiles quietly to himself as he recalls the miracle of love which made his goodness blossom on the bleak soil of his

earlier character. There was Mary Magdalene, her hair down on her shoulders, the sign of the prostitute, the woman of the street, spurned by everybody except One, who did not blind Himself to her faults, for He said, 'Her sins are many', and then added, 'but she loved much'. Indeed, I should imagine that often the harlot falls into the pit just because she loves much and wants to be loved, and, not finding the real thing, sells herself for a substitute-love to those who 'love' her body, but stamp unheedingly upon the lovely things of the soul. One watches Jesus pushing away the rubble and stones and broken bricks, so that the seeds of the beautiful flowers of real love may have the wind and rain and sunshine of His friendship. He saved men and women like that. It was not His teaching. It was His loving. It was not the fulfilment of a ritual. It was just caring.

There cannot be the new world of dreams, can there, until in the New Testament sense we learn to love? And what a wonderful world it will be when men and women, frustrated and thwarted, cynical and unhappy, hating sometimes, indifferent sometimes, are brought through the grace of God to believe in one another and to love one another.

Some of you have said to me that you don't see any part that you can play in making the new world. I think the message of Jesus for to-day would not be that we should begin by 'loving' the Nazis and the Japs, but that we might begin with the people in our own homes and in our own offices, the people whose lives touch ours every day. Everybody can begin there. You can.

'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

## THOU SHALT LOVE THINE ENEMY

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies (*Matthew v. 43-4*).

THAT sounds a very strange text to announce, and seems a formidable subject to discuss, during war time. You might even think it a dangerous subject and one likely to undermine the morale of our people. It might be easier conveniently to forget that Jesus ever said those words. I should not be at all surprised if someone present felt immediately cynical, saying in his heart, 'Do you expect us to love the Gestapo? Are you seriously asking us to love those who run concentration camps, persecute the Jews, lock up little children in filthy railway wagons and send them to unknown destinations, tearing them away from their parents? Have you forgotten already the Nazi atrocities, the inhuman brutality and authentic records of bestiality? The foul deeds of our enemies are proved beyond possibility of doubt, and you have the cheek to stand there in that safe pulpit and tell us to love our enemies. We bomb them night after night as hard as we can. Do you suggest that on an eight-thousand-pound bomb we should tie a label, "With love from Britain"? Surely it would be better if you forgot these words for the time being, At any rate, I'm not going to listen to such nonsense.'

If any one feels like that, I entirely understand. It is a natural reaction to such a text. But since Jesus did say these words, and since it is sheer cowardice to put them in cold storage and drag them out again after the war, when perhaps it is easier to love the people of hostile nations, let us quietly think together about them, reminding ourselves of two important facts.

1. We shall not fight any better by hating people. Such hate is an emotion which would disturb cool judgement and blur good motives. If those in the High Command were moved by feelings -

of hatred of persons they would speedily become unfit to command. Any one who knows the British soldier can safely leave the matter of hate where it is. There is less hate shown amongst those who actually do the fighting than those who stay at home, lose their loved ones and are forced to remain inactive.

2. At this moment we are moved to a more generous mind because the war is going the way we want it to go. It is easier when we are winning to have a right attitude to those we are compelled to fight than when we are depressed or made savage by military reverses.

I can assure you quite sincerely that, with the great majority of people present, I am myself convinced that we must carry the war through to a successful conclusion. If there were a criminal band in London, disturbing the peace of the city, bringing sorrow and pain and suffering to innocent people, maltreating the aged and the poor, driving little children from their homes, prejudicing the peace and happiness of London for years to come, then, I think, most of us would agree that that criminal band should be tracked down, punished, and its activities brought to an end. As I see the war situation, we are engaged in the same task, though the criminal gang is a large one and the methods we must use to bring the criminals to book are bound, in the nature of the case, to be far removed from the dispassionate mechanisms of justice which would accomplish the task in the city of London. One of the most terrible entails of the attack of an international criminal gang is that the only way we can prevent it from having its evil way is the dreadful method we call war.

Last Sunday our subject was 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour', and, in dealing with it, we made it clear that since the word 'love' is linked with a command, it cannot be a matter of the emotions, but must be a matter of the will. Let me read to you 'The Thought for the Week' printed on the back of your Order of Service and taken from last Sunday's sermon. 'When the New Testament commands us to love one another, the appeal is not to the emotion, but to the will. Romantic feeling is irrelevant. What

is enjoined upon all who would call themselves Christians is a sustained determination to show unbreakable goodwill in order that the best qualities in the person "loved" may be called forth.' An emotion is not sufficiently within the control of the will. Therefore, it would be nonsense to say to anybody, 'Thou shalt love', if we were asking them to produce that warm emotion which generally goes by that name. 'Thou shalt love' in the New Testament means, 'Thou shalt adopt a sustained determination to show unbreakable goodwill'. If you remember, last week we went on to show that loving your neighbour does not mean liking him, which again is a matter of feeling, not will; nor does it mean blinding yourself to his faults. It does mean acting *as if* you liked him, for acting *is* within the control of the will.

I want now to work out the same idea in regard to our new topic — 'Thou shalt love thine enemy'. It cannot mean liking our enemy, for no one could be expected to like the typical Nazi. Yet I do want to say that I not only like, but have a deep affection for many friends I made in Germany. They have been silenced by Nazi tyranny and find no means of expressing themselves, but I am sure that they must hate the evil that has seized the high places of power, and that they still love and worship our Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, no one who holds as precious the values for which we are fighting can possibly *like* those who have set themselves to destroy them and who would fain practise a ruthless domination over the rest of the world.

Further, no one can possibly blind himself to the enormities that the Nazi regime has brought to literally millions of innocent people. In my view, the Allied Governments are quite right in demanding punishment: in demanding that after the war, by legal courts duly constituted, those who are responsible shall be brought to justice. To say, 'Thou shalt love thine enemy', does not mean letting him off. Such punishment will deal more charitably with the evil-doer than the lawless revenge of Czechs and Poles would mete out to him.

We are now ready to try to express simply the positive implication of our Lord's words. Loving our enemy means acting towards

him in the spirit of goodwill. Before you dismiss that as impossible while we keep fighting him and dropping bombs on his cities, let me show you two ways in which we still have to practise the spirit of goodwill, which is what the New Testament means by loving.

1. We must refuse to identify the crime and the criminal. Last week I tried to show you how we must do that in regard to our neighbour, and how, indeed, we do it in regard to ourselves. When we have done something about which we are ashamed, we say to ourselves, truthfully and valuably, 'That's not the real I', or 'I didn't realize what I was doing', or 'I'm ashamed of what I did', and we are deeply relieved if somebody in their charity says, 'He couldn't have been himself'. In other words, we make a separation between our real self and the things we do. Showing goodwill towards the enemy, i.e. loving him, means a readiness to believe that the enemy is not expressing his real self in the foul deeds that he does. Years and years of evil teaching have made him accept false ideals. The inferiority which the crushing defeat of 1918 thrust upon him made him ready to clutch at any method of scrambling out of the abyss. The element of vengeance has swayed many German hearts, and Germany once more is trying to impose her aggressive, dominating spirit on the world. But hard though it may be to do so, we shall never make progress in the task of restoring good relationships after the war unless we can do, to some extent, what our fathers called 'loving the sinner and hating his sin', i.e. believing that the German is capable, as indeed he is, of making a contribution to the family of nations which is of immense value.

Some of those present have studied German philosophy, others have studied German music, others again have read German literature, and still more have benefited by German scientific research, especially in the realm of medicine and surgery. I appeal to you never to identify the word 'German' with all that is evil in the Nazi regime, but so to separate the evil from the people that have committed it that you are ready to show goodwill to the Germans, believing that what he has done in the past, in the way of



contributions to culture, he may do in the future if only we do not identify him with the crimes of those who dominate him, and do steadfastly believe in his possibilities for good.

2. A second way in which we must show that goodwill to our enemies which Christ demands is by refusing to exaggerate his crimes. As Christian people we must take a strong line here. Remember those great words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, of which Moffatt has given us so excellent a translation: 'Love is never glad because other people go wrong. Love is only gladdened by goodness. Always slow to expose. Always eager to believe the best.' One of the marks of a Christian is that he never exaggerates the evil of another. He admits it and is honest-minded about it. He doesn't whitewash it or pretend it never happened. But if a Christian gets one into a corner and almost licks his lips with satisfaction as he tells one the horrors that the Japs or Germans have perpetrated, one knows that his Christianity is being undermined by the war.

Into the psychology of all this we need not enter now, but you will realize that to blacken another's character is to feel a little whiter oneself. We feel a little bit better when we have made others seem a little worse. The moral glow which a man feels when he reads in the newspaper of the fall of another is a glow he gets from the fires of hell, not from the stainless beauty of heaven. And anything which makes us feel, 'I should never sink so low as that', rather suggests the machinations of Screwtape than the sanctity of the saints. The Christian attitude would be one of sorrow that members of a race—German, Italian, or Jap—which have contributed so much to world happiness, and will continue to contribute so much more, could have been so deluded and bemused, by those who have seized power over them, as to do such unworthy and despicable things.

Let me summarize in one paragraph my message as I have developed it so far. Loving your enemies means a determination to show them goodwill. It does not mean liking them, or whitewashing them, or blinding ourselves to what they have done, or sentimentally refraining from punishing them. It does mean

acting as though you still believe in them, and acting in two ways: (1) by not indentifying the doer with the deed, as though they were inseparable—since we refuse to do that in ourselves; and (2) by refusing to exaggerate the evil in order to stir up hate or to feel better ourselves.

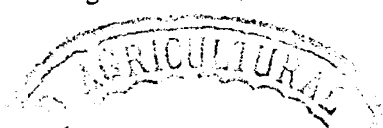
Now let us adopt a device which I have always found helpful in a difficult situation. When one is interviewing people in deep distress, people who ask the question, 'What ought I do do?' one always tests one's advice by asking what would happen if they did the opposite. If, therefore, you are still critical of my repeating the words of Jesus—'Love your enemies'—look for a moment at the opposite: If you decide that you cannot act towards the enemy in goodwill, then you will decide to act towards the enemy in bad will. If you don't 'love' in the sense defined, you will hate, or, in other words, you will seek to bring about not ultimate good to the enemy, which I shall try to show in a moment is one of the great purposes of the war; you will seek to bring about ultimate evil.

You will be unable to seek ultimate evil for the enemy without hating him, and such hate is always a faulty psychological reaction.

When I am dead, what I have guessed so long,  
My soul shall know in clearer, purer light:  
That where I loathed and hated, I was wrong;  
That where I loved and pitied, I was right.

The hatred of people is always a poison. If there were time, it would be interesting to show how true that last sentence is. I would commend, especially to my medical friends present, the evidence contained in the book called *Disease and Integration*, by Dr. Newsholme, the Medical Officer of Health for Birmingham: a book in which evidence is gathered and cases quoted to show that personal hate definitely manufactures toxins in the body.

I am not taking a lofty attitude of condemnation to the emotion of hate, as though I never entertained it myself. The tendency to hate people is a normal—and a non-Christian would say inevitable—result of the denial of desired love. If A loves B and wants all the love B can give him, and if B gives extravagant love to C, then



A tends to hate both B and C. A hates B because he or she has given away love which A thinks belongs to him, and A hates C because C has been a party to the fraud by receiving the love which A thinks is his alone. It is very hard for A to stop hating both B and C. He can only do it by the grace of God, acknowledging meanwhile to himself the desire to hate and be revengeful, but acting as though he still loved both B and C, realizing that if he gives vent to his hate, he will spoil his chances of attaining his goal, viz. that of winning love. He can only win love by giving love, and, if he cannot give the emotion, he must give the goodwill, i.e. he must love in the New Testament sense. Once he gives rein to his hate, he will harm himself more than he can possibly harm the person he hates. If, therefore, you say to me, 'I shan't listen when you tell us to love our enemies', I shall reply, 'Beware of the opposite, for by hating you will harm yourself more than you can hurt your enemies'.

Further, this hate will bring about a permanent dislike, and the dislike will mean that you steadily refuse to see any good at all in the person hated. Once you do that to Germans as a whole, you postpone the very thing for which we are fighting, viz. a world of new relationships. If we exclude Germany from this, we only sow the seeds of another war in another twenty-five years. I should like to bear witness, with pride, to the spirit of most British people, even those who have lost their loved ones. There is nothing like the hate in this country which I remember in the last war. During the last war, in some places, German music could not be played at a religious service. People were commonly heard saying, 'There is no good German but a dead German'. Such sentiments are rarely heard to-day. Sometimes the emotion of hate sweeps over a person who makes some such unguarded statement as I heard a lady make in a railway carriage, viz. that every German should be exterminated. But when I suggested to her that she should be given a sword and invited to start on a class of blue-eyed, golden-haired German little children, her face told me that she would be the last to carry out her expressed desire. The hate was in the emotional part of her mind for a moment. It had never

gained access to her will or her thought. To hate the enemy would be sin, for it would be making an unbridgeable gulf in international relationships, while knowing that the purpose of God is to make of all nations one family. It would be fighting against God.

'But', you will say, 'how can you use the word "love", even in the New Testament sense of showing goodwill, when night after night you are bombing the enemy?' Well, let's go back to the earlier illustration of the criminal gang. Supposing, we said, that there were in London a criminal gang, it would be the duty of the State to end its activity, even at the cost of human life. Granted that war is a faulty method of dealing with international criminals, yet—and the blame of this lies upon all our hearts—it is at present the only method of achieving the desired result. I hold, therefore, that it is justifiable. Because the method is a bad method, as compared with police activity in dealing with the crime of a city, the goal we have in mind may still be the same. Thus, the goal which the State has in mind is to make every criminal a good citizen. The goal the Allied Governments have in mind is to make the Axis Powers good neighbours. We desire the good of the enemy, though he himself, plus the sin of all the nations, have driven us to terrible methods of securing this end.

Let us make it clear to ourselves that the State, again and again, has to use a method which would be sin in the individual. For example, if somebody offended you personally, and you, with the help of a friend or two, tied him up in your cellar for six months, then I am afraid you would get into trouble, even though you could prove that you had fed him and given him some degree of comfort. Yet the State is rightly approved for passing a sentence of six months, during which a man's liberties are restricted in probably a more austere way than the individual would adopt. In the same way, what would be murder in the individual may still be justified as the activity of the whole State, if it is the only way the State can find of achieving its end.

It may be that the State must even take life, and the Bible seems

to me to approve that principle. For it is very important to point out that, when you read in the Old Testament the ancient command, 'Thou shalt not kill', you are reading in a bad translation. The Hebr̄w original means thou shalt do no *murder*, which is a very different thing. Murder is sin. It is an act in which the individual assumes an authority that may only belong to the State. And in the New Testament, when Jesus repeats the commandment, we find that the word used is not a word that means 'kill', but 'murder'. Jesus does not say, 'Thou shalt not kill'. He does say, 'Thou shalt do no murder'. And if the State finds that the taking of human life is the lesser of two evils—the other being the spread of international crime—if the taking of life is the only way by which an international criminal gang can be put down and the highest human values preserved, then I claim that the State has the right to take life, *and in doing so is not denying her purpose to show goodwill*, and to show goodwill is, in the New Testament sense, to love. Therefore, there is no necessary conflict between loving your enemies and killing a sufficient number of them to make the rest desist in their attempt to spread evil.

Some of you may remember that shortly after the war broke out, when we were all trying to think our way through these things, I told a story of some Chinese pirates. I was rather amused afterwards to find that somebody who heard me tell that story quoted it in Hyde Park as an answer to a pacifist speaker. The speaker, who is a great friend of mine, made fun of the story, supposing that I had invented it to substantiate my own argument. Actually it was not a made-up story at all. It was true and, if you turn up the files of the *Daily Telegraph* for February 2, 1935, you will find the details. What happened was this. Some British and American children were on board the steamer *Tungchow*, on their way from Shanghai to school at Crefoo. They were set upon by pirates in the China Sea. With those facts in our mind, let us imagine that we were in charge of the children. If the pirates would not listen to reason, would not discuss the matter, would not do anything else than take the children off to their lair in the mountains for immoral purposes, do you think you would be justified in sending

a wireless message for a destroyer or an aeroplane? I am quite sure in my own mind that it would not be wrong to send such a message. Let us at once admit that it is wrong to risk drowning a pirate. But if your daughter of sixteen or seventeen had been on board, would you not feel it was a better thing to risk drowning pirates, or bombing them, than that an innocent girl should become a prostitute in a Chinese camp for perhaps a dozen years in some remote mountain fastness? In the actual case I am quoting the children were rescued by planes from the British aircraft-carrier *Hermes*, supported by the British destroyer *Dainty*.

To my mind the international situation is not dissimilar. As we engage in war there is no joy in our hearts at the terror and destruction it causes. For my own part, even the news of successful engagements gives me no feelings of hilarity, but only a kind of grim satisfaction that the end of the war is that much nearer. I have stayed in the Christian homes of some who lived in the area inundated by the floods released through the breaking of the dams in the Ruhr Valley. I think of one German Christian home in which I stayed for several happy days while attending a Christian Conference. It consisted of a Christian father and mother, two girls and a rosy-cheeked boy. Probably they were all swept away by a wall of water thirty feet high sweeping down upon them, and I am not ashamed to tell you that I cannot feel that it is a matter for rejoicing. All that one can feel, amidst the conflicting emotions of sorrow, sadness, and grim acquiescence, is that probably only by such means can we save the remaining cities of Western civilization from the horror which befell Belgrade, Warsaw, and Rotterdam. One recalls, for example, that, *before war was declared on Holland*, and meeting with very little, if any, resistance, the Germans slaughtered thirty thousand people in Rotterdam, with not even the pretence of destroying only a military objective.

Again and again, life presents us with the difficult problem, not of deciding between the perfectly right and the obviously wrong, but of deciding the kind of question to which I have made reference. For example, shall the lives of the pirates be destroyed, or shall the British and American schoolgirls be made prostitutes?

Even when one lifts the question to the highest Court and asks what would Jesus do, there can be little doubt about the answer. For when we remember the perfection of Jesus, it does seem important to remember that Jesus was not a perfect Man working in a perfect world, but a perfect Man working in an imperfect world. If the former had been true, there would never have been money-changers to turn out of the Temple, or proud Pharisees to receive the lash of His words. But Jesus was the perfect Man working in an evil world, and could only do that which would achieve His end in the circumstances thrown up by evil. I feel confident, therefore, that the war must be prosecuted to its end and that we may even pray for the victory of our arms because, far from perfect though we may be, we have to use the only method to achieve our end which the evil in the world allows.

I know how deeply the thought of taking the life of the enemy troubles the consciences of some present. I know how hopelessly inconsistent some feel it to be to talk about loving your enemy and trying to kill him at the same time. But on the way home in the bus or tube think over this problem: Supposing you imagine that you yourself were about to commit the most horrible crime you can imagine yourself doing. I will not cite any imaginary horror, for there is no point in harassing your feelings. But then imagine that, before you committed this dreadful crime, you were shot. I wonder, if in the life to come, you would not be glad that you were shot before the crime was committed. You might even, in the next world, go up to the person who pulled the trigger and say, 'Thank you very much. You did me a service.' Jesus said a man was better dead than cruel to a child. This argument does not mean that you should go around shooting people here and there in case they commit a crime they will regret! Remember what we said about the State being morally able to do that which is denied to the individual. But, in the light of the illustration, ask yourself the question again: Is taking life necessarily inconsistent with showing goodwill? I think it might be the highest expression of goodwill to Germany to stop her, even by killing, before bestial

horrors have turned the whole world into a jungle. War, I claim, is not a denial of goodwill unless it makes you hate, and that is in your own hands.

I have\*talked in this sermon about enemies as though the Axis Powers were the only ones. I must leave to you the application of the interpretation of the text in terms of your own personal and private enemies, but I will leave with you a picture which I saw lately in the Press. A group of our men had been fighting fiercely and heroically in North Africa. They had been definitely trying to encompass the death of the enemy. Then, suddenly, the word went round that all resistance in North Africa was over and the campaign was ended. The very men who had been trying to encompass the death of the enemy are seen in a Press photograph giving the same men—now German prisoners—chocolates and cigarettes. Now, that is a parable. As soon as the enemy ceased to be the personification of the evil we are trying to destroy; as soon as it became untrue to say that the only way of destroying the evil is to destroy the people who practise it; as soon as the identification of evil with the people who committed the evil no longer needed to be made, then our determination to show goodwill was able to take a new turning, and our men are seen, not killing, but handing out chocolates. But please note this. *The determination to kill and the offer of chocolates came from the same motive, viz. the motive of goodwill towards the enemy.* That goodwill had to express itself in killing first, because that was the only way of stopping the evil which the Nazi regime embodies. When that evil offered no further resistance, it was possible to separate the sin from the sinner, the evil from the people who *had been* doing it, and chocolates and good fellowship became the new expression of goodwill.

Such a picture made me wish that those who arrange the terms of peace should be those who fought the enemy. At the end of the last war we handed over the making of peace terms to politicians. I will make no comment on that save to say that the men who fought in the last war would never have imposed the terms which



politicians imposed. French politicians were particularly difficult and revengeful. I wish, when victory comes, the voices of Eisenhower, Alexander, Montgomery, and Wavell—four men, be it noted, who are deeply convinced Christians—could have sway in the councils of peace.

Love your enemies! Never let yourself hate! You may have a desperate task to break the evil which threatens the world, and the only way may be to fight and kill. But though we fight to the death, let us maintain unbroken goodwill and have the highest welfare of our enemies, as of the whole world, clearly in our minds, as the goal toward which we move. Those enemies also—possessed though they may be at present by evil demons—are the sons of the same Father who hates evil more than we do, but who loves all His children. When Jesus said, 'Love your enemies', He added this: 'for so shall ye be the sons of your Father who sends His rain on the just and the unjust, and maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good.'

A prayer that shows the true Christian spirit to our enemies was offered by the Chaplain at the Sunday morning parade service on board the battleship, the *Prince of Wales*, on Sunday, August 10, 1941, at the historic meeting off the coast of Newfoundland between Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt, the meeting that gave us the Atlantic Charter.

'Stablish our hearts, O God, in the day of battle, and strengthen our resolve, that we fight, *not in enmity against men, but against the powers of darkness enslaving the souls of men*, till all enmity and oppression be done away, and the peoples of the world be set free from fear to serve one another as children of one Father, who is above all and through all and in all, our God, for ever and ever. Amen.'

## THOU SHALT LOVE THY GOD


WE come this morning to the third of the trilogy of sermons of which the first was from the text, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour', the second, 'Thou shalt love thine enemy', and now the third, 'Thou shalt love thy God'. The order is not accidental. It is hard to love one's neighbour. It is harder to love one's enemy. For many people it is hardest to love God. In regard to the neighbour and the enemy, we can put on them part of the onus of the difficulty of loving. We can say 'My neighbour'—even if we use the term in the widest sense—'is difficult. In any case I don't get on with strangers very well.' In regard to the enemy we can say, 'It is particularly difficult in these days to love one's enemy, and if I don't succeed it is partly his fault'. But in regard to God we cannot put the onus on Him. If God is the perfect Being and we fail to love Him, the reflection is on ourselves.

Yet I cannot feel that we are entirely to blame. On a lovely spring morning, if health is good and spirits are high, and our loved ones are near us and our relationship with them happy, and none of them is ill or in danger, and we know of no people with whom we are out of harmony, and business or professional cares are not worrying us, then, with Browning's 'Pippa', we may go out into the sunshine and say:

God's in his heaven,  
All's right with the world.

It is easy, then, to tell ourselves that we do love God.

But there are days when God seems far off, vague and unreal. There are days when the spirit is half-dead within us and all the wheels of being slow: 'when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down; when the road seems dreary and



endless, the skies grey and threatening; when our lives have no music in them, our hearts are lonely and our souls have lost their courage.' There are days when the soul is stunned by bad news; a loved one is lost in battle or reported missing, or illness threatens those we love better than life, or news of bereavement turns our heart to lead and drives the sun from our sky. God's ways seem so confusing. It is hard to understand what He is doing, and difficult to love Him as one recalls the things that He allows. Many men, weighed down by the suffering and sorrow of the world, would confess that they do not really love God. If they were honest they would say that they were critical about God and sometimes hostile to Him. They are only made unhappy by being told that they *ought* to love Him, for 'ought' and 'love' don't go together.

No true father says to his sons or daughters, 'You *ought* to love me because I am your father', and it would be wise if we honestly recognized that in many families there is a good deal of insincerity in this matter of loving relatives. To suppose that brothers really love one another merely because they are brothers is to live in a realm of pretence. The frequent quarrels of sisters point the same way. Husbands and wives are frequently supposed to love one another, but in many a home, love has given way to kindness and to the desperate attempt to keep up appearances by making the best of a bad job. To call the relationship by the same name as that which binds two people who never chafe one another, always call out one another's best, find rest of mind and kindling of spirit in one another's company, wanting to do everything together and each finding himself or herself incomplete without the other, is indeed a misuse of words.

Those who carry out psychological treatments frequently find that relatives hate one another, and neurosis has often been set up by pretending to love and repressing feelings of antagonism and even hatred. Many a patient has suffered in childhood from some tyrannical and dominating parent who happens to have been labelled 'father'. Such a patient has never admitted to consciousness that she does not love him, because all the conventional shams

of modern life and the Christian ideal she supposes she ought to hold, conspire to tell her that she may only admit to consciousness the word 'love' since the person concerned is her own father. Were he not her father, she would readily admit that she hated him and despised him, and she would find at any rate the beginning of some degree of health in labelling the emotion with honesty instead of with sham. Such a patient frequently breaks down at her father's death, especially if she has nursed him through a long illness. For she has a new conflict. She is really relieved and glad he is dead, but convention demands she should be sorry and show the signs of grief. She frequently develops the obsession that in some obscure ways she is responsible for his death. It is much more important for our mental health that we should be honest than that we should be conventional and, as we said, 'ought' and 'love' don't go together. The master can say to the naughty schoolboy, 'You *ought* to be sorry'. If he could look into the schoolboy's heart, he would learn a good deal of psychology at once. He may proceed to cane the schoolboy, and then he does make him sorry, but he only makes him sorry that he was caned or that he was found out. To make him really sorry for the fault demands a different approach altogether. The only schoolmaster who can make this approach is one who has an insight into the nature of things and who realizes at least the fundamental principles by which an emotional response of a true order may be evoked.

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Now, we always get a glimpse of the nature of God's ways with us by thinking about an *ideal* family. Jesus Himself again and again argued thus from the ideal in man to the ways of God. The ideal father does not command that he be loved emotionally. He realizes that the fact of being a parent does not give him any right to demand love or even loyalty or even respect. These must be won. (In parenthesis, we often notice that a father realizes that he must win these things from, say, the little boy next door, and he sets himself out to do so when the little boy next door comes to tea. But to his own little boy he is frequently brusque and

demanding because he supposes his own boy *ought* to love him.) In the two previous sermons about loving our neighbour and our enemy, we found the key that opens the door. We said that, when we talk about loving our neighbour, the *feeling* of love was not meant, because an emotion cannot be commanded, but that loving meant a determination to show unbreakable goodwill. When we talked about loving the enemy, the only way in which we could make sense of the command was to understand by it that we were to show the enemy an attitude of goodwill, and we proceeded to show that even fighting him might be an expression of that goodwill. For we are not fighting the German people as such; we are fighting the false ideas which have become their ideals, and with which at any rate the Nazi Party has so identified itself, that the only way of overthrowing the ideas is to fight those who express them in their activities. Such fighting shows more truly an attitude of goodwill than a complacent indifference which allowed Nazism to spread over the world, to damn the souls of those who practised it, and to victimize those who suffered through it.

When, therefore, the text says, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God', it cannot mean, in my view, a feeling of warm emotion. That cannot, in the nature of things, be called forth by a command. What we have to show to God is goodwill. The father in the family, we said, cannot command emotion, and, if wise, does not try to do so, but, as the head of the family, he has the right to command goodwill so long as his aims are directed to the welfare of the family as a whole and to every member of it. The family will fall to pieces if everybody is sabotaging the unity of the family and its purposefulness towards a high ideal. Thus the father has the right to say to his sons: 'Do show me goodwill. Here are my purposes. These are my plans. This is what I am out for. Do co-operate with me. The unity of every family is essential in society. It is the basis of the happiness of the whole State. Don't, therefore, behave in a way that is hostile to those interests which we all have at heart.' It would be a heavy father indeed who delivered himself of such a lecture to a young family, but, roughly speaking, I think that would be the attitude of an ideal father's

mind. And I think that is the kind of thing God asks when in this commandment, which is underlined by the authority of Jesus, we are told to love the Lord our God with all our powers of heart and mind and soul, and thus of all our strength.

There will be many times, as we said at the beginning, when we have no warm emotional feelings about God, but, unless we are disloyal, there need not be any times when we sabotage His purposes and run our lives in opposition to His will. We may not be able to give God our feelings on many an occasion, but feelings do not matter and feelings aren't asked for. There need be no occasions when we cannot offer God our will and goodwill, and ask that, even on our dullest days, we may help, not hinder, His holy plans.

So to serve Him by the offering of our will, even when feeling seems dead within us, is a truer expression of loving God than sitting in a deck-chair in the garden *feeling* that we love God because the sun happens to be shining and the birds are singing, but never turning our hand to those great enterprises which we know to be His will. We are to love with all our strength. *Strength* is not expressed in *feeling*, but in the *directed will*. If that purposefulness is fired by feeling, so much greater the strength. But feeling alone doesn't get things done.

Even the phrase 'loving with all our heart' is not—I think—an appeal to the emotions. Supposing that for twenty years you had set your heart on great literature, so that you knew the great poets and dramatists and prose writers, and could quote them and communicate their magic to others. Supposing then, with a crowd of other people, you found yourself in a prisoners of war camp. The welfare officer seeks you out and asks you whether you could give a few talks on literature to relieve the tedium of the other prisoners. I think you would be persuaded into helping. After all, literature is the thing you had *set your heart on*, not in feeling only, but in purposefulness. Your twenty years' enthusiastic study fitted you for a piece of service which no one else could give. Doesn't God say to us, 'Set your heart on My kingdom, on the welfare of My

world family. Study My ways with men: come into close fellowship with Me. Then, when the moment comes, I can use you? Emotion plays a part, of course, for it is impossible to separate thinking and feeling and willing. But loving God with all your heart does not merely refer to the flow of warm emotion. I think it means purposefully turning your whole being to the contemplation and study of God's ways with men, that, entering into the joys and delights of His kingdom, you may further His purposes in the world. As a boy sets his heart on stamp-collecting; as a man sets his heart on being a great lawyer; as a girl sets her heart on being an able violinist; as a mother sets her heart on making her home a place of rest and recreation and renewal, let us set our hearts on the things of God and love Him with all our hearts.

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Loving God with our mind is such an immense subject that I hesitate to embark on it. It seems to me to mean a readiness to think things through with absolute honesty and untiring industry. I know that Christianity is a simple thing in one sense, but it is necessary that we should use all the powers of mind that God has given us to try to understand His ways with us. Fortunately, to be a good Christian one can be simple-minded and without high intellectual power. Indeed, the man of simple faith often has insights into divine things that take him farther than the theologian. At the same time, fearless and honest thinking would do a great deal for us, especially when we are confused and distressed by the things that happen to us. To have *thought out* a philosophy of life before calamity happens, as well as to 'have faith', is to find shelter in the day of storm. Not to have done so, to have clung to an untruth or half-truth, even with much faith, is to find that the shelter breaks in upon one in the hour when one needs it most.

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind'—thou shalt be willing to think things through. People hate to be made to think. In religion many seem to prefer magic and the mumbo-jumbo of meaningless words. Others seek to make themselves

believe by repeating words instead of understanding them. But loving God with the mind means a fearless determination to follow truth wherever it leads us.

I was pulled up violently in this matter in India by a student with whom I attended a service during which the Creed had been recited, including the words, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body'. He asked me what the words meant and I replied that I meant by them a belief in the survival of personality after death. 'If so', he replied, 'why don't you say so?' The phrase, 'the resurrection of the body', if words are taken at their face value, means that the particles buried in the grave will be gathered again in some future state, and no one believes that now.

I am not making any cheap jibe at the Creeds. They were set down, not to express final truth, but to combat immediate error. It is a matter for discussion whether they should continue to be used when, concerning their phraseology, one continually has to make mental reservations and odd interpretations involving making the words mean what those who wrote them down certainly did not mean. For everybody to say the same creed, but to mean something different by the words used in it, is to attain a spurious unity by a species of intellectual dishonesty. Some think the Creeds should be restated every few years. Others argue that it is enough to keep the traditional words if modern explanations are made. But it is certainly wrong to allow room for so much misunderstanding that people hug words to their bosom when the strength of the truth has gone out of them. Many people to-day do not lack faith, but, not having been taught to love God with their minds, they 'wander in perpetual twilight among shadowy ghosts of former faiths' which they do not really understand and cannot intellectually embrace, but, for lack of clearer alternative, they cannot expel. In an attempt to rethink our way through Christian belief, we may have to reduce the number of beliefs very considerably, but it is better to have a few simple truths which carry intellectual conviction than to seek to embrace the whole theology of Christianity by mumbling words which we do not



understand or cannot accept. I cannot help feeling that God loves the fearless, questing mind, even though there are many things which cannot yet be accepted because of the honesty of that mind.

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind'—thou shalt not say words that don't mean anything or mean something that cannot be accepted by the mind. Jesus opposed the hoariest traditions in order that He might satisfy the august claims of the truth. Somebody has asked what the condition of the nation's health would be if, in the days of Henry I, somebody had written down thirty-nine articles to be followed by all physicians for the rest of time. But our spiritual health is in peril partly because we are using words which the man in the street does not understand, and which lead him astray if he takes them at their face value, and concerning which we have to give elaborate explanations which amount to admitting that the words mean something very different from what they say.

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I must not attempt to work out all the meanings of loving God with the soul. I think it means turning our spirit to Him, seeking to find harmony with Him, being undismayed by the things that seek to lure us from Him, never accepting defeat through sin, but turning back to Him again in obedience and renewed dedication, and maintaining, by every means we know, our sensitiveness to His guiding voice. We may not have the ecstatic experiences of the mystics. We may not be very clever and be able to argue for our Christianity. I find that, more and more, it means for me putting one step down in front of the other, doggedly going on and trying to give God obedience and loyalty, setting my heart on the things of His kingdom, my will to obey His commandments and my mind to understand His ways and my spirit to look up to Him in prayer. Feelings and mystic experiences are not for me to demand as they are not in my power to engineer.

There is some kind of summary of my theme in the simple words of a song written by Maude Louise Raye:

To love someone more dearly every day,  
To help a wandering child to find his way,  
To ponder o'er a noble thought, and pray,  
And smile when evening falls;

To follow truth as blind men long for light,  
To do my best from dawn of day till night,  
To keep my heart fit for His holy sight,  
And answer when He calls,

This is my task.

## ON HAVING A RIGHT SENSE OF VALUES

ONE of the most important things in the world is that we should have a true sense of values, and that, in spite of all the hostile forces that threaten to destroy it or undermine it, we should be able to maintain it.

What do we mean by our sense of values? We mean our assessment of those things which are of greatest worth. It is interesting to recall that the word 'worth' and the word 'worship' come from the same root and that the origin of the word 'value' is the same as that of the word 'valour'. Our sense of values, then, is our appreciation of those things which are really the valorous things, the strong things, the lasting and dependable things.

The importance of having our sense of values right is seen in this: that nothing would make the life of the whole community deteriorate more quickly than the abandonment of the 'values', or the substitution of false values for true ones. Obviously, if wealth is a 'value', if one supposes that making money is the most worthwhile use of time and strength, one will be dominated by the pursuit of wealth, and possibly spend fifty or sixty years of one's life with that quest as its main aim. Every energy will be bent to that end, and so dominating can be the pull of our sense of values that we can become ruthless in yielding to its pressure, and we can rationalize—or unconsciously give ourselves plausible reasons for—deviations from truth and honesty and kindness while we pursue our goal.

Pleasure, having a good time, squeezing selfish happiness out of life, constitute for many life's main ambition. In other words, pleasure is a 'value' in their estimate of things. They seek to obtain selfish happiness, becoming increasingly diffident about the needs of others and blind to the more worthwhile things. The more this 'value' is given prominence in their lives, the more they

miss a much greater happiness and much deeper joy, for the highest type of happiness is never gained when it is the *object* of our search. It comes to us as a *by-product* of a search for something else—namely, a truer value like unselfish service, or friendship, or artistic creation.

I travelled in the compartment of an express recently with a girl of twenty-three, fair-haired and blue-eyed and attractive to look upon, who boasted to the man sitting opposite to her, and who had offered her a cigarette, that she was making the journey from London to Bradford in order to attend a party. It was impossible to avoid hearing their conversation. She boasted that on the previous evening, which happened to be Sunday, she had taken so many neat whiskies before dinner that she could not tell what she was eating at dinner. I was rather pleased when the man opposite said, 'I am very sorry to hear it'. She evidently thought to impress him with the story of her vulgar orgy. The train was crowded and soldiers were standing in the corridor, and one thought of this young girl, on the one hand, and young men, on the other hand, who have given up their careers and are offering their very lives to make England safe and free, and to build a new world for girls of twenty-three as well as for future generations.

But turn to more enheartening pictures, When some of our soldiers and airmen who had been prisoners of war in Germany came home in the recent exchange, they left behind them a certain Army doctor who was an ophthalmic surgeon and who elected to stay in a German prison camp. When the fact that he was entitled to come home was pointed out to him, he said something like this: 'While I have been in the prison camp I have been able to treat blinded prisoners, and in some cases to restore their sight. Others in similar need will come to this camp, and I want to remain to help them.' He did not attach supreme worth to personal comfort and selfish happiness, but he valued more highly the chance to serve others in their need. In other words, his sense of values was different from that of the girl, so it was *worth* staying. When a man says, 'It's worth it', he reveals his sense of values. I think of that boy whose story I have told on the wireless and

printed elsewhere, who went out during the last war into no-man's-land where the shells were falling, to save his wounded friend. His superior officer gave him permission, but added, 'It isn't worth it. Your friend must be dead, and if you go out there, you will be wounded or killed yourself.' However, the boy went, hoisted his friend on his shoulder and carried him back to safety. But he was terribly wounded himself and his friend appeared to be dead. 'I told you it wasn't worth it', said the officer. 'Your friend is dead and now you are mortally wounded.' 'But it was worth it, sir', said the hero. 'Worth it? How could it be worth it?' The officer almost snapped the question. 'It was worth it, sir', said the boy, 'because when I got to him he was still alive, and he said, "Jim, I *knew* you'd come".' The high claims of friendship were a value that made the sacrifice worth it, and our whole life depends on, and is governed by, our sense of values; our estimate as to which things in life are worthwhile and which are not.

Modern life has made it increasingly difficult for us to keep our sense of values from being confused. Dr. Temple, the late Archbishop of Canterbury, in one of his addresses to Oxford students in 1941, said this striking thing: 'The world, as we live in it, is like a shop window in which some mischievous person has got in overnight and shifted all the price labels round, so that the cheap things have the high-price labels on them and the really precious things are priced low.' Then he added, 'We let ourselves be taken in'. Oh, my soul, heed that word! 'We let ourselves be taken in.' Getting on in the world, having a good time, making money, chasing fame, seeking beauty, indulging in sex expression without thought to the cost to others and to our own better nature—how we follow these aims with unwearying purposefulness! Let us find time to-day to sit down quietly and ask ourselves these questions: On what am I really setting my heart? What goal do I seek to reach? What am I really looking for in life? Have I got my sense of values right?

Since the 'blitzes' started in London, I have noticed so many people who have been pulled up in their quest for life's prizes and

who have begun to think that perhaps their sense of values has gone wrong. A faith that is a real anchor in the day of storm, a deeper communion with God, a habit of rewarding prayer, the secret of inward serenity, a heart cleansed and freed from besetting sin—how they wish now that they had these things! In calm, happy, successful, healthy days, these things never seemed to matter. They were priced low. But in the hour of crisis and danger we know that they are the real gold of life, and we wish we had more of such gold with which to meet the immense spiritual expenditure which these days demand. People are in the mood now to mark those things at a high price, but they didn't think much of them in the carefree, easy days before trouble fell, and now they have got their sense of values muddled up. As Dr. Temple said, 'We let ourselves be taken in'. We said, 'What shall I do to be comfortable? What shall I do to be happy? What shall I do to be well-off? What shall I do now so that I shall not have to do anything later on?' We never said, 'Which is the way that leads to true life?' or 'How can I achieve the integration of my personality?' or 'Who can show me the way to inner satisfaction?' or, if you like it better, 'What must I do to be saved?'

We leave so late the questions that matter, don't we? I sat with another Methodist minister in the home of a charming and wealthy layman who was entertaining us both. The talk turned on Wordsworth's poetry, and our host turned to us and said, 'You two make me jealous talking that way. I have always thought I would like to read a lot of poetry, but I have never had time. When I have made my pile, I shall take it up.' He was quite sincere about it, but he never did take it up. A sense of values is not a thing you can switch over, like turning the knob of a wireless. You cannot engineer an interest in it, let alone attach dynamic purposefulness to it. It becomes harder and harder, as the years pass, to direct your life by a new star. Self-discipline is both more necessary and more irksome, and if you spend fifty years with the dominating aim of making money, you can't suddenly say to yourself, 'Now I will like poetry'. You lose your taste for the lovely things, or, worse still, they don't seem *worth* so much. Your sense of values

alters, or perhaps some tragic thing happens. You say, 'I will turn to this or that one day'—but you never do. Procrastination and the absence of self-discipline play the devil with our values. 'He who stays in bed on Sunday morning', said Dr. Selbie of Mansfield College, Oxford, 'may not be committing a great sin, but his sense of values is being filched from him. He is putting the value of comfort higher than the value of self-discipline and worship.'

There is more than fun in the story which Mr. Winston Churchill used in a recent speech, when he told of the sailor who dived into the waters of Plymouth Harbour and saved the life of a little boy. Two or three days afterwards the sailor came across the boy and his mother in the streets of Plymouth. He saw the boy nudge his mother, and the mother then stopped the sailor and said, 'Are you the man who pulled my little boy out of the water?' Expecting some kind of gratitude, the sailor smiled, saluted, and said, 'Yes, madam'. 'Then', said the mother, with mounting anger, 'where's his cap?' We smile at the story, but our sense of values has in some cases gone as far astray.

How can we test our sense of values? I want to suggest that you write down on the back of an envelope these three ways:

1. A real value would remain if all that could be taken from you were taken.
2. A real value would not be rendered worthless by any situation that could possibly arise.
3. A real value is recognized by the kind of satisfaction we get when we acknowledge it in action.

Now all three points can be illustrated by reference to the three ultimate values of truth, beauty and goodness.

Think of truth: dependable, eternal, which (1) no persecution can take from you, which (2) no circumstance can debase in value, and (3) to assert or defend which gives us a kind of spiritual satisfaction. Men have been glad even to die for the truth. Take a look at Andrew Melville, the Scottish reformer, threatened with violent death at the hands of the Earl of Morton, and saying, 'Tush, my lord, make these threats to your courtiers. It is all one to me

whether I rot in the earth or in the air. It is not in your power to hang or exile the truth.'

Take a look at that scene almost at the end of Masfield's play, *Good Friday*, when the old man who is selling lilies musingly says to Christ:

Friend, it is over now, the passion, the tears, the pains,  
Only the truth remains.

Or turn to beauty. Isn't it a lovely thought that, however trying and horrible the circumstances may be through which we still have to pass, no device of Hitler, no power of hell, no bestial atrocities of Nazis, no sorrow or loss or pain can take the glory from the dawn, or silence the singing of the birds, or annul the judgement which the beauty of a starlit night delivers on the hateful ways of little men?

On one of those dreadful days in 1914 when the lights were going out in Europe, Viscount Grey sought composure at Lady Glenconner's house, where Mr. Campbell McInnes sang to him some of Handel's songs. Afterwards Grey wrote to Mr. McInnes these words: 'Europe is in the most terrible trouble it has ever known in civilized times, and no one can say what will be left at the end. But Handel's music will survive.' Beauty is a value, eternal, indestructible, undebasable, spiritually satisfying.

Then turn to the strange appeal which goodness makes. A little while ago in London a man rushed into a blitzed and blazing house in the night to save a little girl whom he believed was trapped inside. In truth, she was standing behind him in the darkness and he did not know it. Yet who will say he threw away his life? At the close of Meredith's story, *Beauchamp's Career*, the hero is drowned in rescuing a little riverside boy who had fallen into the water. The contrast is drawn between the great gifts and brilliant promise of Nevil Beauchamps, who gives up his life for what Meredith calls 'the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in this world in the place of him'. The book leaves us with the question, 'Was it worth it?' But those who have their sense of values right can answer the question.



Truth, beauty, and goodness, and their derivatives, like kindness, friendship, love, sincerity—what a strange appeal they have to us! What responses they call forth from us! Having seen them we could not deny them their authority even if we would. They have secret allies in every heart, often sleeping, but often awakened, and if awakened, making us respond in a way that seems almost independent of, and above ourselves, carrying us to an acquiescence with the true, the beautiful, and the good that startles us by its glorious authority and compelling power.

How can we maintain our sense of values? Now, the back of that envelope again, please, and write down this:

1. By reminding ourselves of what we are.
2. By reminding ourselves of what we cost.
3. By reminding ourselves of where we are going.

Let us look at those three points a little more closely.

1. Someone has aptly said that it is not so true to say that man is a body and has a spirit, as that man is a spirit and has a body. It was with this in mind that in the opening prayer I used that familiar but lovely phrase of St. Augustine: 'Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.' Man, the spirit, may maintain his sense of values by reminding himself that, *because* he is spirit, he will never be happy by pretending that he is only a body and a mind.

One of the distressing things about some modern novels is that they almost suppose that man is not even a mind, but is only a body. I shall not spend time now reminding you of the immense dangers and difficulties into which English life is drifting through following one of the demands of the body. Venereal disease is only one symptom of those vast dangers. I will only say that in thirty years' experience in the Christian ministry, I have never found any of those alleged short-cuts to happiness, such as free love and promiscuous sexuality, lead to anything but illness, both of mind and body, to psychological maladjustments, to tears and unhappiness. Listen to the concluding sentences of a modern novel, the name of which I shall not give:

'I came out of a cloud of thoughts to discover the narrow compartment with its feeble lamp overhead and our luggage swaying in the rack, and Isabel, very still in front of me, gripping some wilting red roses tightly in her bare and ringless hand. For a moment I could not understand her attitude, and then I perceived she was sitting bent together, with her head averted from the light to hide the tears that were streaming down her face.'

Passion was a value. Its falseness was proved. The end was tears. Yes, if only we could remember what we are!

2. And if only we could remember what we cost. 'Ye are not your own,' said the Apostle, 'ye are bought with a price.' At our Friday Fellowship somebody said something like this: 'If only we could realize all that it cost God to save us, we should never sell ourselves again for either lust or gold.' What a true word that is! When we look at the Cross and are in the right mood and have humbled ourselves to look with understanding, dimly and faintly there dawns on us something of the agony of God Himself in that greatest act of all human history, when through the precious blood of His dear Son He gave to the uttermost because, in His loving estimation, we were *worth* it. If we knew *that* and could realize *that*, we should maintain our own sense of values. I never expect to be able to put the little measuring tape of my mind round the mystery of the Atonement, but if from time to time, looking at the Cross, I can say, 'That is what it cost Him: He thought I was worth that', then I think I shall not be able to sell myself for the worthless things. As Faber said,

That Thou should'st think so much of me,  
And be the God Thou art,  
Is darkness to my intellect  
But sunshine to my heart.

3. But thirdly, if we realized where we were going, it would help us to keep our sense of values right. My friend, Dr. Sangster, in one of his grand books, has an excellent illustration here. When the *Titanic*, he tells us, was going down, a certain titled and wealthy woman, who had been allotted a place in one of the boats,

rushed back to her stateroom and snatched up, not her jewellery, but—three oranges. An hour before the accident diamonds were more valuable than oranges, but not now, not on a journey when diamonds could do nothing, but when oranges could satisfy both hunger and thirst.

Well, we are on a journey too. Where we are going diamonds won't buy anything, nor money, nor fame, nor sex, nor beauty. . . . Let us ask again the questions we asked at the beginning: What do we seek most in life? What do we value most—remembering that we are off on a journey to a world completely spiritual? It would be hell to be at an endless concert and not to be able to appreciate music, or, perhaps, even to hear. The only thing left is music and the only way to enjoy it is through appreciative hearing. It would be hell to be at an everlasting banquet and not to be able to eat anything. It would be hell to be in heaven and never to have developed any taste for the things of the spirit, when the things of the spirit are the only things that remain. How many people in hell, both this side of death and the other, must say, with an anguish that deserves the word flame, 'If only I had kept my sense of values right'.

The late Lord Stamp, one of the greatest authorities in Britain on economics and finance, and also-a Methodist local preacher, once gave a wireless talk on 'The Gold Standard'. It was technical and abstruse, but listen to the magnificent witness of his last paragraph: 'Before I finish I should like to say one other thing, and it is this. I have not the slightest interest whatsoever in any scale of values excepting only as it may subserve that other scale of values introduced into this planet by Jesus of Nazareth. That is the only scale of values which ultimately matters and which no man, now listening to my voice, can ever afford to ignore on peril of his soul.'

'I do nothing', said Socrates, 'but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your property, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul.' That sounds very much like the word of Another in whom all the true values were gathered together and

harmoniously realized in action. 'Don't worry over much', he says, 'about the things to eat and the things to wear, and don't spend your money on that which is not bread. Don't let your lives be overcome by the trifling or the tawdry or the tinsel treasures for which men seek so passionately and for so long. Get yourself into the right relationship with God. Seek ye first His kingdom. Hold on to the lovely things and everything else will fall into the right perspective.'

I wonder why it is that the true values have such final authority over us. It is not because they pay. Men feel a satisfaction at telling the truth, or discovering it, when it means pain and loss to tell it or to know it. Many have died rather than deny the truth. Beauty often has for us in certain moods the stab of pain, and as to the good, let me quote the late Archbishop Temple again. This time the quotation comes from his book, *Christus Veritas*.<sup>1</sup> "There are some forms of good deliberately chosen in which the element of pleasure is almost non-existent, while pain is very prominent. Of such good we may say what George Eliot's *Romola* says of the highest happiness: "We only know it from pain by its being what we would choose before everything else because our souls see it is good." Why *have* the values such power over us? Whence their high authority? Why are there things for which we would rather die than do? Why is it that everybody *knows* that kindness is better than cruelty, and love is better than lust, and truth is better than lies? Can it be that the true values are the very attributes of God, sign-posts pointing to Him, voices calling us home?"

<sup>1</sup> William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (Macmillan & Co.).

## WHY PEOPLE DON'T GO TO CHURCH

Ever since the service broadcast from this church last Sunday morning, I have had a strange, but very definite, feeling that I must speak to-day not to the members of the church and the regular worshippers, but to some who, I have been led to feel, have come to worship God, after perhaps a long absence from church, during which they have given Him little chance in their lives. My mind would not settle to any other subject. I sent in the title of a subject earlier in the week, but when the proof of the Service Paper was submitted to me, I deleted it at the last moment. Even if there is only one person present who is in the condition I have described, 'my voices'—as I sometimes call such intuitions—drive me, with a compulsion I often resist, to speak to him. So that the word 'you' in this address this morning means specifically you who have drifted away from God, given up all attempt at prayer perhaps, kept away from His House, shut yourself off from His love, and left Him out of your life.

First of all, I want to say to you a sincere word of welcome. We want to know you. We want you to come into fellowship with us. We do not pretend to be in any way superior. We stumble and make mistakes. We go back on our vows and we let Christ down. But we really do love Him. We believe that He stands for the highest things in life, and we believe that if you, and all the other people who secretly admire Him, would join in fellowship with us and with all those who want to see His spirit working through the world, then the evils that we all hate would go down before us, and that in our personal lives we should find, as a by-product of finding Him, that rare, incredible happiness in which the soul finds its deepest satisfaction and its truest life.

I wonder if you know how often you have set us a problem, you who seem so much better than your creed. Again and again in our

Friday Fellowship I have been asked the question: 'How is it that so many people inside the churches seem difficult, hard to get on with, often mean and petty and unloving, and yet so many people outside the churches seem broad-minded, tolerant and generous?' Possibly you would be the first to recognize that a tree may flourish because its roots go down to an underground stream, the presence of which few suspect, and its leaves are lifted into a sunny air which it shares with the trees around it. A great many people never go near the churches and almost boast that religion plays no part in their lives, but, when they were little children, their devoted parents saw to it that their roots went down to the rivers of God and those underground rivers, below the conscious levels of the mind, still bring strength and nourishment. And life for all in these islands, whether churchgoers or not, is still lived in the atmosphere of a Christian country, for although the phrase 'Christian country' is mocked and scorned and is the object of an easy sneer, Christ's influence is in our Statute Book and His sunshine plays upon the lives of men and women, whether they recognize His power or not. It is true that many of us need Christ's influence to spread more powerfully and widely through our lives. Some of us *are* mean, intolerant, unloving; some of us, all our lives perhaps, have had less promising material to deal with in our own make-up than you have had; and you perhaps have escaped any severe times of testing but, at any rate, we should be far worse without Him, just as you, who have come back to church this morning, would be even finer with Him.

May I suggest four reasons which have kept you away from church? In enumerating them, I am not going to utter criticisms against the Church. I know that many church services are dull, that religion seems irrelevant, that membership is too lightly held, that ecclesiasticism repels you, that doctrines seem intricate and difficult to understand, that ritual seems bewildering and confusing, that we parsons are this and that, and that the Church is still divided within itself. These factors count, but you can't do

much about them. I am going, rather, to try to speak more personally to *you*, to endeavour to look into *your* mind and to lay bare the real reasons which, I think, account for your keeping away so long.

The first, and, as I think, the greatest, is the fear of hypocrisy. Jesus hated hypocrisy, but I do not think He hated it more than the modern Britisher does. The trouble is that the modern Britisher does not understand what hypocrisy really is. The word that Jesus used for 'hypocrite' means a play-actor, one who is never a real person, but is endlessly acting in a play, and who, therefore, never *intends* to square his real character with his acted part. What is a hypocrite? Not a person who does not live up to his ideals, *but a person who does not try to*, who has no intention of squaring his behaviour with his profession. The modern British business man subconsciously argues like this: 'Hypocrisy is the blackest of all charges that can be brought against one. Therefore, in order not to be charged with falling below what I profess, I will profess nothing. Then I can be consistent, and, whereas I shall be scorned if I fall below my profession, by professing nothing I can obtain merit by occasionally living above my profession.' He, therefore, steers as far away as possible from contact with religion because it would make him a marked man. Thousands of people listen-in to the wireless who would never be seen in a church. They even write to the broadcasting minister. They know their letter will be treated in confidence and answered carefully, and yet they will never have to meet him or run the risk of being identified with religion. They have not been seen leaving a church and no one knows they wrote to a minister. There is even psychological insight in calling some of the places in great cities where men and women worship, 'central halls'. You will find that the entry is on the pavement level, never up steps. There may be steps inside but never outside, lest a man be *seen* going into church. He can slip in and slip out of a central hall unseen, and, indeed, if he is unfortunately encountered, it is a 'central hall', not a church.

This terror which men have of becoming marked men, of being thought religious, is mirrored in the general dislike of ministers.

If one wants to be sure of a corner seat in a railway carriage, it is a splendid idea to wear a dog-collar. Even if the train is filling up, the minister hears a voice say: 'Come on, George, there's room farther up. There's a parson in there.' During the last war, one of my greatest friends who is now a minister, but who formerly was an engineer, gave several days a week in the engineering shop of a shipyard. On these days he was seen, not in a dog-collar, but in his blue overalls. On one occasion he made a considerable journey dressed in overalls and got into conversation about religion with a man in the opposite corner of the carriage. So friendly did they become that my friend offered his card, saying to his new acquaintance, 'Come and look me up one day'. The man glanced at the card and seeing the title 'The Rev. —', handed it back to him, and said, 'You've given me the wrong card'. 'No,' said my friend. 'What,' said the other, 'are you a parson?' 'Yes,' said my friend. 'Why not?' 'Well,' said the other, 'you're the best — parson I've ever met, but if I had known that you were a parson, I wouldn't have been seen talking to you.' It is strange to find that a man who is an Oxford Blue or an Honours graduate, welcome in any society, hail-fellow-well-met by all the world, should, within a month of entering Holy Orders or a Free Church ministry, be regarded as something not quite human, and be avoided wherever possible. I remember so clearly during the last war how Tommies would come to one, quite ready to discuss religious matters, but always prefacing a sentence with, 'I'm not a religious bloke, Padre', terrified lest you should think that they were 'coming over'; always intent to hold aloof.

Can I affectionately suggest to you this morning that it is not very worthy to decide in advance that you will never even attempt the heights lest you be scorned for falling, that you will only set yourself to walk along the level mud-flats, where achievement is easy and safe? 'Let him practise what he preaches', shouts the man in the street at the parson. If he is worth his salt, he tries to practise what he preaches, but don't ask him to preach only what he practises or you will get worse sermons than you do get, for he would have to scale aspiration down to achievement. The minister



with his people form a fellowship of those who are together seeking the highest things in life, and this morning they call you to join them and to put that unworthy fear of being called a hypocrite away.

The second reason why people don't go to church is that religion is not 'the done thing'. All around us there are still men and women who, as tiny children, were *compelled* to go to Sunday school and *had* to go to church. Too often they saw, in the lives of those who directed them, little of the gladness and joy and radiance of the true Christian. Religion was a dreary duty which had to be carried out in obedience to adult command. Little wonder then that, when these youngsters grew up to the point where adult tyranny could be thrown over, they threw over religion without ever discovering what it was. They lost the baby with the bath water, but, as the baby had never lived, the loss seemed small.

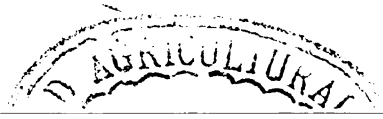
We may say, and often do say, that we don't care what other people do or what other people think. Whenever I hear a person say that, I feel certain that quite recently his armour has been pierced and that he is feeling very sensitive at that moment about what other people do and what other people think. There are few things in peace time that we fear more than the opinion of others. So much so that a number of my friends dare not suggest, to those who linger at a tea-party on Sunday afternoon, that the company should adjourn to church. Going to church is not 'the done thing', and they dare not suggest it even when they would like it. Every psychologist realizes that a man may be six feet tall and proportionately broad and pass as a man of the world, but emotionally he may still remain a little boy. We remember from memories of our schooldays what torture it was to be different from the other boys, and, in our hearts, we are little boys still. The ladies present will not mind my saying that there is not one of them who would have a hat exactly like another lady's hat, but even more so, there is not one who would be seen out in something that looked nothing like any hat ever constructed. Would it be unfair to say that you are still a little girl, and that fashion sways you with a dictator's might? A challenge comes this morning to all popular men and

all beautiful women. It is you who so greatly determine what is 'the done thing'. If you are popular enough, or charming enough, you can even do the odd thing, and not only get away with it, but persuade others to do the same. The Church could do with more people who make religion popular, and who dedicate their popularity, charm, and influence to the highest cause in the world.

During the last week I was invited by an important City firm to take a service for their employees at nine o'clock on a work-day morning. It was a privilege to speak to that congregation of all denominations and of none. It was gratifying to think that an important firm hauled their colours to the top of the mast and made that public act of witness. It would surely be difficult in that particular business for a foreman to bully his men, for a departmental manager even to suggest that any practice should be followed which was not quite on the straight. I have accepted an invitation to take a similar service in the City with the employees of another firm, and I am glad to record these evidences of the fact that business men of weight and influence are prepared to help make religion 'the done thing'. The best definition I know of a saint is this: 'a saint is one who makes it easier for others to be good.' If there were more saints, more folk would come to church and join in the fellowship of those who seek the heights.

The third reason why people don't go to church is the oft-heard dirge that someone who professed much has done some unworthy thing. We who are Church members and regular worshippers must take this to heart, for, in a very real way, Christ has committed His cause and His honour into our hands. Wherever we go we are watched with a penetrating scrutiny. Men make decisions based on our reactions to life, out of all proportion to the importance of those reactions.

I can never forget that terrible story of Mr. Gandhi's early life. It is said that, when he was a rising barrister in Bombay, he heard that native labourers in South Africa were being unjustly treated, and he made the voyage to South Africa to plead for them in the Law Courts because no white lawyer would take up their case.



One Sunday evening he made his way to worship in a Christian church, but was met at the door by a white-faced but black-hearted official, who said, 'This church is not open to niggers', and directed the would-be worshipper to a native mission hall in another part of the town. I have read that Mr. Gandhi registered a vow that he would never attempt to enter a Christian church again, and Gandhi has a way of keeping his vows.

But when all that has been said, the logic of the person who says, 'I will have nothing to do with the Church because I know a churchwarden who ran away with somebody's wife, or a deacon who stole the collection, or a vicar who diverted gifts for the poor to his private pocket', is strangely at fault. It is just like saying, 'My doctor is a duffer. I shall not seek health any more.' If religion is what I believe it to be, spiritual sunshine, fresh air, and abounding health, what fools we should be to miss it because there is a parson in Dartmoor who stole the collection. The logic is absurd. It is like saying, 'I have finished with music because the girl next door can't play Beethoven's sonatas'.

The question is, 'Has Christianity power to change men's lives or has it not, and, if it has, do we want it or are we prepared to miss it and dismiss it?' I was speaking only recently with a distinguished agnostic, who appeared to hold the mistaken view that the main evidence for Christianity was intellectual evidence for the truth of its theological dogmas. With his first-rate brain he realized the difficulties of accepting the story of the Virgin Birth. He weighed the problem of the Holy Trinity as it appeared to a thinker. But thousands of simple people have found new life in Christ who have not the mental apparatus to appreciate the fine points of an intellectual argument. The evidence for Christianity is not intellectual; it is the lives of the saints. It is the true stories of people who have entered into an experience comparable with exchanging winter for spring, or passing from darkness into light, or from bondage into freedom.

I always wish that I could take the doubter to an Indian village untouched by the power of Christ, and take him back some years later after that power has had the chance to make itself felt. A

little while ago one Hindu said to another, 'I hear that funds have given out and the English missionaries may be withdrawn'. 'Well,' said the other, 'they have accomplished one of the miracles of history. They have brought it about that the name of Jesus is honoured from one end of this land to the other.' At the present time, five thousand people a week are pressing into the Christian Church in India, and a high authority of the London Missionary Society (our friend, Dr. Chirgwin) tells us that, at the present rate, all the people in India will become Christian within the next hundred and fifty years. During the last ten years the number has grown from six and a half millions to nine and a half millions.

I see in imagination the Indian jungle village untouched by Christ; infant mortality is 50 per cent, illiteracy—by which I mean inability to sign one's name—is 94 per cent., girl babies are thrown into the jungle for the wolves and the jackals, because it is believed to be a shame to have girl babies; they mark the anger of the god. A woman prays for a child and is told to attend the temple at a certain hour in the night. She is told that the god will visit her. The truth is the priest rapes her. In that village men sell their children as slaves to the landlord before those children are born. There is tyranny, darkness, superstition, terror, cruelty, ignorance. But visit that village again ten years later. A young girl has left England, with all that England holds dear. Probably she holds a university degree. She is quite content to sit in a mud room, without any of the apparatus of the modern educational institute, and teach little Indian children; not for education's sake, but for Christ's. That building over there is a hospital. A brilliant youngster with his doctor's degree sacrifices all prospects of a four-figure salary, and, for five pounds a week, he is spending the best years of his life healing Indian natives of their many diseases; not for health's sake, but for Christ's. Fear and tyranny and terror are banished. Love and light and joy take their place. Has Christ power or not? Is Christianity worth while or not? C. F. Andrews, the missionary, after obtaining a first-class degree at Cambridge, spent scores of years in India and died worth less

than £60. Why? Was he a fool? Was he mad? If that is madness, it is more attractive than our sanity. And I could not help pointing out to my distinguished agnostic friend that a world full of men like C. F. Andrews would be a lovelier, happier, nobler place to live in than a world full of agnostics.

Don't let us miss the greatest transforming power in the world because some reprobate lets religion down.

The last reason we can give now as to why people don't go to church is the hardness of the Christian way.

It is sometimes said that Christianity has failed. No! Christianity has been tried; found difficult and thereupon given up. Of course, one of the great troubles within the Churches is that a great many people have given it up and don't know it. They offer service to Christ. They attend many services. They listen in to innumerable wireless religious talks. They even engage in religious discussion. But they are spiritually dead. Their character doesn't show that attractiveness, that joyous sense of power, that inner serenity which mark the true Christian. Frankly, they don't intend to take Christ seriously. They like to stimulate their minds with the beautiful thoughts in which Christian truth is expressed. There is something about a Sunday evening service, with shaded lights and subdued music, which gives them what they call a thrill, and they falsely suppose that that frothy emotionalism is somehow healthy for them and pleasing to God. In fact, of course, it is neither, unless it has its counterpart in objective living. Few things undermine the real health of the soul more than to hear continuously words describing great experiences, or expressing mighty truths, without ever *intending* to bind one's will to carry them out, and few things can be more displeasing to God, for we are all the time coating ourselves with an armour of familiarity that blunts the sharp arrow of His word to our souls.

I cannot say, and would not say, any word which would seem to make the Christian way easy. It is easier in the long run than the way of sin, because from the latter you have to come all the weary way back, but many of us won't believe that until we have found

out where sin leads us. And, to use a common phrase, some folk need a long run for their money. Until that dreadful moment of self-revelation comes, most of us who complain that we cannot find God are not really seeking Him, and, when we say we have not time for our prayers, we really mean that we have no taste for His company.

The Christian way is a hard way, and, like everything else that is worth while, it will always remain so.

But let me leave you in a different atmosphere. Put away from your mind all accretions that have gathered round Christianity, some of which have become substitutes for it and others which destroy its truth or blunt its cutting edge. Go back to the very beginning of things. Make an imaginative picture now of the beach at Galilee. Over there are the green hills, before you the blue, blue sea. You are alone—not even with your best friend. You are not in a hurry. You are not rushing to catch a train or fulfil an engagement. You are walking thoughtfully and quietly along the edge of the water, where the fret of the tiny waves runs up the sand at your feet. Now imagine that Jesus overtakes you and slips His hand in the crook of your elbow and walks along with you. You are silent for a time. You know that He is reading your innermost thoughts and you are not very proud of them. I think within a few minutes you would be telling Him your story. How sick to the very soul you are with yourself, with the poverty of your efforts and your failure to reach your ideals. I know that is just how I should feel. And I think, for a moment that you would really feel very sad, almost heartbroken. He is everything we long in our best moments to be, and yet we seem to be hopelessly beaten by failure and sin.

But I am quite sure that, in a very short space of time, a little fire of confidence would begin to burn in your heart because He would talk to you. He believes in what you may become, whatever you are now, and however grievously you have failed. And before He had walked a mile along the beach with you, He would make you feel it too. There would be an exultant confidence

within your heart saying: 'I can. I *know* I can become the kind of person I want to be.' And when He left you—if, indeed, you felt He ever did leave you—you would know that in another sense He was always there, the available Friend who, knowing the worst, believes in the best, who lifts up the fallen to new faith in themselves, who heals the broken spirit and leads men on to fullness of life. Did He not promise this Himself? 'Lo, I am with you all the days until the end of the age.' So, go out now with Jesus, for Jesus is with you. That is Christianity. The Church exists first and foremost to offer Jesus Christ, and the new life He brings, to men and women like you.

## WHY PEOPLE DO GO TO CHURCH\*

WE hear a great deal of complaint in these days that people don't go to church, and in the last sermon discussed some reasons for this. Let us look now at the reasons for which people *do* go to church. Here you are on this lovely summer morning, none of you living near the church, all of you having come an average of seven or eight miles. Within seven or eight miles are all the parks in London. With the same expenditure of time and money, you could have been sitting in the sunshine, or strolling through the woods, or bathing in the river. Why have you taken train, tube, and bus to come into the very centre of this gloomy old city with its reminders of the ruin and desolation of war?

Half a century ago it might have been true to say that many people went to church because it was the conventional thing to do. The men put on terrible frock-coats and top-hats, and the ladies were appropriately garbed—I will not attempt a fuller description of their dress—and they would have been shocked at the very thought of not attending church at least once on a Sunday. That is certainly not true now. I don't suppose there is one person present this morning from a purely conventional motive. There may be one or two reluctant husbands dragged here by their wives, but that kind of compulsion doesn't count for much church-going these days. The truth is that those who now attend, though fewer in number, are of more sincere motive. They are truly seeking something or Someone, even if the goal of their quest is a little uncertain even to themselves. Let us all this morning ask ourselves why we come, for if we are clear about what we are seeking we are much more likely to find it.

Here, then, are four reasons why people come to church.

1. The first—and by far the most important—is that you come to worship God. You do not, I trust, come to hear a preacher, or to hear lovely music, save as both do what they are meant to do,



help you to worship God. And what does worshipping God mean? It means all that prayer means—adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession, meditation, dedication—and we cannot, of course, discuss them all now. But I do feel very sorry for a person who has excluded God from his life, who, neither in joy nor sorrow, has any sense of 'otherness' about his life; who, on a lovely morning like this, as he wakes up after a night's refreshing sleep and finds himself healthy in body and mind, has no one to thank. I pity even more a person who, in the depths of sorrow, has no one to offer him comfort, and still more the person who, crushed beneath a burden of sin and self-loathing, has no one to whom he can turn, no philosophy of life except a bleak humanism, no resources of strength save his own. One of my friends was driven to a belief in God by the sheer intolerableness of supposing that man was alone in the universe, with no outside help whatever, and with no hopes at all save those which arise from man's self-born striving.

I came across two sentences in my reading lately which express that forlorn attitude. Here is the first: 'Man is a low form of cellular life on his way to the manure heap.' Here is the second: 'Man is fighting a lone fight against a vast indifference.'

I believe that you have come to church on this lovely morning, in spite of all the alluring voices calling you elsewhere, because you believe in Someone, strong, loving, serene, and holy, who is the personification of all those qualities which you believe matter most to man. They are of priceless *worth*, and I need not remind you that the word 'worship', the word 'worth', and the word 'worthy' all come from the same root. As you look up from your humanity to God, your spirit is already climbing up to realize that in Him there are, and that in you there may be increasingly, those qualities in life which are of greatest *worth*.

It is not my intention this morning to go into that vexed question as to whether God is so self-sufficient that He does not *need* our worship at all. I think, if I were pressed, I should say that, of His own ordaining, He has decreed that His entire perfection lacks something if it is denied human response. But I

cannot, at any rate, escape the belief that God is *pleased* with our worship. Supposing that you had enough money and time to make a very lovely garden. You would set it about with trees and lawns, flower-beds and shady pools, and you would welcome into it little children. It would be true to say that every flower in the garden was already yours. But if some little child, whom you loved, plucked a flower and brought it to you and said, 'I picked this for you', would you not be pleased? You would not say, 'They are all mine, anyhow'. Of course, they are all yours, but, if you loved the child, it would give you joy to think that he picked something that was beautiful and gave it to you. You would be delighted that his little mind linked up together the beauty of something and the desirability and suitability of giving it to you. God has made a lovely spiritual garden in which are thoughts and feelings and acts, as well as the translation of His thoughts into the things we see and hear and touch. All are His already. But if you come into this garden of thinking and feeling and willing this morning and offer Him your little blossom of worship, and say, 'I have brought this to you', He will not say, 'I need it not'. The offering will bring Him joy, and, if the figure of speech may be pressed, He will wear your flower in His breast. Said Tennyson,

Our wills are ours to make them Thine.

So are our thoughts and feelings and every power of our personality.

But apart from that, apart from what worship may mean to God, I am quite sure that it can mean something very important to us, and it is because of that that we do come to church. Our minds lay hold on those qualities which we believe He not only possesses but *is*, and, as our minds lay hold on the thought of what He is, to some tiny extent we become like that ourselves. 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.'<sup>1</sup> I suppose the psychology of it runs somewhat thus. Whenever you express an emotion, you strengthen the emotion. When, therefore, you express the emotion of admiration for those things which God is—and

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs xxiii. 7.

worship is partly such an expression—admiration for the qualities concerned is increased, and it is a commonplace to say that we tend to become what we admire. In a more profound sense than perhaps the words have sometimes meant to us, man is made in the image of God. The man who looks up to God in worship is constantly being *remade* in the image of God. The sneer has often been uttered that man makes God in his own image, and I admit the danger and comparative truth in the sneer, but in worship, as our hearts go up to Him in adoration, God remakes us in His own image. To some tiny extent we become like the God we worship. Even, therefore, if a man comes to church in a bad mood, then the music, the hush, the beauty of the building, the grandeur of the hymns, the majesty of God's word and the message of the preacher may so remind him of the things of God in whose image he is made, that, as it were, he will put out the hands of his spirit and draw down into himself something which his best self has always admired, and he will strengthen, not only the emotion of admiration, but the will to possess the admired quality. That, then, is our first point. People come to church to worship God.

2. Secondly, people come to church to find forgiveness. Don't be shocked if I say that nine times out of ten that doesn't make sense at all. They don't find pardon because they don't seek it. They have such a faint sense of sin. How many people this morning even noticed the petition in the monotoned Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses'? It is no good pretending. We just let the petition slide over us. Unless we have a real sense of sin, felt either as a personal burden or a share in the corporate guilt for the evils in the world, we find no reality in the offer of forgiveness. And the truth is that, more and more, the modern man tends to give sin a more attractive title. It is not *sin*; it is his inhibitions or complexes or perversions. It is his heredity or environment or the treatment of his nurse in infant days. It is moral disease, for which, it is said, he is no more to be blamed than for measles. It is due to evolution; the legacy of the jungle

for which he cannot be held responsible. An Oxford friend wrote me recently of a girl for whose illegitimate baby he wanted me to find parents. The father was unknown. The girl wanted to be rid of the baby. But, in the writer's view, the girl hadn't sinned. She had, in his phrase, 'slipped up'. She had been 'unlucky'. It was a mere peccadillo, a youthful adventure that turned out badly. There was no thought of a little life pushed out into the world with neither father nor mother; of a holy thing made cheap and shameful; no case needing forgiveness. There was no sense of sin.

If there is not even a sense of guilt in regard to the gross sins, when will men wake up to a sense of sin in regard to the evils Jesus condemned such as unkindness, spiritual pride, the unforgiving spirit, gossip, failure to do our duty to those who pay us to do it, the neglect of the suffering of others and causing the weak to stumble? Forgiveness is unreal because in the main, the sense of sin is weak and even where it exists, God is thought of as a sentimental indulgent Father, who will pat us on the back and say, 'There, there, I'm sure you didn't mean it'.

But sometimes, as I am proud to know, there steals into this building some burdened spirit, some depressed heart, some crushed soul, writhing sometimes in a torment of agony and self-loathing, and then what has been a truth of the intellect becomes what Shelley called 'a truth of the emotions'. A truth to which the reason assented becomes a truth that burns in the heart like a living flame. We might use the illustration of the motor car and say that the energy expressing itself in the revolving fly-wheel suddenly becomes geared in and the car moves forward. Something that had always been true becomes a power to drive and to satisfy. When that happens we are caught up into that unity with God which is one of the most amazing experiences we can know. I am not talking now to any one who has no sense of sin at all, who is not burdened in that way, though I would in parenthesis suggest that truly to look upon the spotless purity of God would, if we let it do so, produce a deep and healthy sense of sin. I am talking to any one who has come to church this morning feeling unworthy, over-burdened, sick of himself, and I am offering in the name of

Christ that miracle, much more amazing to me than many of the miracles in the Gospels, by which we can leave the burden here. It really can fall off our shoulders. We really can go out of these doors without it. We can reach that unity of God which the birds, who have never known sin, express, which the flowers, that worship in unblemished splendour, reveal, which the stars, shining in a majesty unassailed by evil, manifest; a unity deeper than they can ever know, the unity of the sons of God. We can be caught up joyously, gladly, volitionally, into that perfect harmony with God. There is no greater experience in the world than that. You may have 'known' all your life that God forgives sins, and then come into church one morning and 'know' it in a completely different sense. I am aware that you may find this pardon outside the Church, but every part of the worship of the Church is there to remind you of God and of the endless offer of His forgiveness.

I remember this happening to me during the last war. I wasn't a chaplain then, but a Staff officer riding from one Arab sheik to another on Government business. I had not been able to attend a service for weeks. One Easter Sunday night I remember going into a crowded Y.M.C.A. tent to a service. I cannot remember a word of the sermon or who preached it, but we sang that great hymn, 'Christ the Lord is risen to-day', and suddenly His presence became a fact. His forgiving love became real. I think I felt something of what Wesley felt when, having *known* the fact of forgiveness for years, having preached about forgiveness, having gone as a missionary to Georgia and offered forgiveness to others, he afterwards sat in a little room in Aldersgate Street and *experienced* forgiveness for himself. 'I KNEW', he wrote, 'that Christ had forgiven my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.'

The rapture of this experience no one knows until he has had it. It was of this that Masfield was writing when he made Saul Kane say<sup>1</sup>:

O glory of the lighted mind,  
How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.  
The station brook, to my new eyes,  
Was babbling out of Paradise;

<sup>1</sup> John Masfield, *The Everlasting Mercy*.

The waters rushing from the rain  
Were singing, 'Christ has risen again'.  
I thought all earthly creatures knelt  
From rapture of the joy I felt.  
The narrow station wall's brick ledge,  
The wild hop withering in the hedge,  
The lights in huntsman's upper story,  
Were parts of an eternal glory,  
Were God's eternal garden flowers.  
I stood in bliss at this for hours.

Our second point, then, is that people come to church to restore a broken relationship, to find the forgiveness of God, and they should go out, whatever they may have done in the past, looking up into the face of God and saying to Him, 'There is nothing between us now'.

3. Men go to church to find fellowship. One of the things that used to please me most about the old City Temple was the fact that people would write again and again—not only our own members and regular worshippers, but visitors—to say something like this: 'As soon as I crossed the threshold I felt that I was amongst friends.' I want that to be true of this place so kindly lent to us, and if we, as members of the City Temple, pray more and love more, if we gossip less and find fault less, eager, not to see where others are wrong, but eager to see and draw out their best, if we come here determined, not only to get good for ourselves, but to make it easier for others to find God and to find love and friendship, then even strangers and wayfarers will find something here worth coming to seek. I am quite sure that the synagogue at Capernaum was quite different when Jesus was present. I do not mean when He was preaching or reading the Scriptures, but when He was worshipping there, and if we come in the right spirit to pour out our hearts in prayer and intercession, to ask God to unite us with all others present and give us loving thoughts about them, then the whole service can become a unity of fellowship, so that the downhearted and unhappy, the lonely and the sad, the mentally tortured and the spiritually dead, will be caught up into fellowship and thus into the life of God.

I have been rather disturbed in my correspondence lately because so many people have talked about taking their own lives. I know that my correspondence is unusual and that I am, therefore, liable to get a distorted view of life which, for the great majority, is probably still happy. I know that I spend most of my time with people who are either ill in body or mind or else unhappy and in some kind of distress. The war has something to do with it, not because the war can destroy the Christian faith, but because so often it proves that we have no real hold on the Christian faith, that what we thought was faith was merely assent, or else faith in something false. But, insanity and nervous illness apart, people would never talk about taking their lives if they had the security that comes from belonging to a fellowship in which one is loved. One can be desperately unhappy, worried and restless, but a fellowship should be strong enough to hold one, however great the individual agony. I think the suicide is the person who, at the dread moment, believes that nobody cares or that nobody cares enough. The Christian Church should offer a fellowship that goes down underneath that tendency towards disintegration, as though to say, 'We love you and we will hold on to you'.

I believe that the very memory of what Christian fellowship can mean can become a strong factor in a man's life. A man I know had been a victim of sex temptation and had successfully resisted it over a long number of years. Only his very best friends knew what a battle this particular problem was for him. One evening he found himself on business in Berlin with time on his hands. Strolling down the Friederichstrasse, his attention was caught by a large framed photograph of nude women. You can guess the kind of place that was thus advertised. He was greatly tempted to go in. No one would have known. His character would not have been damaged in the eyes of his friends. His respectability would have been unsoiled at home. Then suddenly, with great resolution, he walked away. A hundred yards from the place he had an immense sense of relief and spiritual power, and, when asked how he had found strength to make that

great decision, he answered without hesitation, 'My Church at home'. Even the memory of the fellowship, even the thought that he belonged to a company of people who loved him and who, with him, were seeking together the high and the lovely and the true and the beautiful things, strengthened him in the hour of temptation.

There are eleven people here this morning who will be received for the first time into the fellowship of this church at our Communion Service, and I would like to think that the memory of this morning, when they stand here and grip my hand as a symbol of gripping all our hands in unbreakable friendship, will be strong enough to hold them in the hour of temptation and need. For they will enter this morning, not only the fellowship of the City Temple, but the fellowship of the Church of Jesus Christ. By that I mean a fellowship that goes right across the world into all lands, where men are worshipping in jungle villages, in desert towns, in ice-bound solitudes, in tropical forests; a fellowship that goes back throughout all the centuries, a line of witnesses in an unbroken chain so that as we imagine it we note that the last man in the chain has his hand in the hand of Christ in a little Upper Room at Jerusalem. A fellowship indeed that not only goes across the world and back through the centuries, but up into the unseen. 'Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name, evermore praising Thee and saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy".'

Our third point then is that men come to church to find fellowship.

4. Lastly, people come to church to find power—spiritual power for this difficult task of living. Here again I suppose the psychology of it is this: Power is released in the will through the emotions whenever the mind takes hold on truth. I would ask you to ponder that statement. Whenever the mind is really possessed by truth to such an extent that we *feel* it to be true, as well as giving it our intellectual assent, then power is released in the will. The will alone is not enough. The feeling alone is not enough.



One might risk the illustration that feeling is to the will what petrol is to the machinery of a motor car.

It is all very well for people to tell us that everything depends on will power. I was reminded, by a sermon of Dr. Fosdick, of one of the hymns in the Congregational Hymnary (No. 434):

Awake my soul, stretch every nerve,  
And press with vigour on;  
A heavenly race demands thy zeal,  
And an immortal crown.

Phillip Doddridge wrote five hundred hymns, including 'O God of Bethel', but 434 is not one of his best. Certainly when he wrote it he was not in any deep trouble. I can imagine very few situations in which I should wish it to be my message. The people I talk to are not very interested in an immortal crown. They are wondering whether they can get through to-day and to-morrow without defeat, and whether they can stick the war out without breaking down, and I for one would not dare to say to any one, 'Stretch every nerve'. The people I deal with have got their nerves stretched to the breaking point.

As regular worshippers know, in our Morning Service we offer intercession for our King, our Prime Minister, our Members of Parliament, and those who direct and carry out operations on land and sea and in the air, but in our evening worship we have more of the atmosphere of the City Temple at family prayers, and we offer our intercession for those who are nearer and dearer to us. To-night I shall ask you to pray for a young woman who wanted very badly to be a surgeon. She took the long and arduous medical course necessary and passed with distinction in surgery, and was ready to set out on that grand career. But in a bomb explosion, glass was flung in her face, and, for a long time, it seemed as though all hope of her ever being able to see had gone. She has had thirty-five operations and there is left to her only the glimmer of sight in one eye. Shall I say to her, 'Stretch every nerve, and press with vigour on'?

Also to-night I shall ask you to pray for a little family I know. The father is a Methodist minister. There are two daughters, one

fifteen and one twenty. The girl of fifteen is what a girl should be at that age, healthy, happy, full of life. But what shall I say about a lovely girl of twenty, at the very threshold of life, whose brain has been infected by germs which have destroyed her controls, so that she cannot be left day or night? I have consulted a Harley Street specialist on her behalf, and his opinion is that there is no hope whatever. Twice she has tried to take her own life, and there always exists the danger of her attacking others. The sentence of the most eminent medical opinion is that she must remain in a mental hospital for the rest of her life. . . . That may be fifty years. Yet for periods she is entirely sane and pleads to be taken home. Shall I say to her and to her stricken family, 'Stretch every nerve, and press with vigour on'?

We will not harrow one another's feelings by talking thus. If you and I were meeting in a little room, you would say to me, 'Yes, I know a case where . . . ' and I would only have to open my own diary at any week in the year to tell you of case after case of deep human need, so deep that no human resourcefulness is an adequate reply. All last winter, when the horror of bombing went on night after night, I found it almost unbearable to listen to some new story each day. There are people here this morning who have lost their boys, lost their home, lost their business, lost everything except their faith. I would not like to ask them to say to themselves:

Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve,  
And press with vigour on.

I would not presume to offer them the petty shallowness of any word of human wisdom, the pagan triviality of being told to endure, the irritating irrelevance that others suffer similarly, the heartless torture which falsely teaches that all suffering is punishment for sin.

But I think I know why such people come to church. I am glad that in this church there is a cross on the altar, and that on that cross a Figure hangs. Those people come to church because the only comfort for them is God, not God explaining Himself in arguments, for no explanation I have ever met satisfies the need of

the mind, let alone the hunger of the heart; not God remote and far away, but God coming down into human life and into human suffering; God who is Himself crucified and who still remains serene, calm, loving. That God, who doesn't try to answer our questions, answers our need, and I believe in a God who brings His children through their dread sufferings with finally nothing lost, but with something gained which is of immortal worth.

Since I have criticized one hymn, let me offer you another verse:

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Those who come to church and find the real God answer for themselves the question with which we started, 'Why do men come to church?' They come to worship, they come to find pardon, they come to enter a fellowship, they come to get power. No! No! We need not divide it thus. They come to find all their deepest longings satisfied when they find God Himself. He is the Goal toward which our spirits move. He is the Reality behind all men's dreams. He is the Answer to all our prayers. Jesus, who was the supreme Master of the art of living, could not live without God. Can you?

## WHY SHOULD I READ THE BIBLE?

LET us begin by being perfectly frank with one another about the Bible. We really would like to find in it those treasures which other people are alleged to find there. We should feel that it was a serious affront if anything cut us off from the reading of the Bible. We have learned that it is still the best-seller of all the published books the world knows. Pious people, again and again, have told us to read the Bible and say our prayers. Probably if we were going away for more than a few days we should put a Bible in our luggage. We might leave it on the bedside table when we unpacked, and there it might remain to impress the lady who made our bed. During a holiday, it probably lies unopened, but it is at least something that we take with us. Recently in this church it was not difficult to persuade people to give a considerable sum of money so that Bibles might be sent out to the troops at the Front. I was once in a party of people who were discussing what books they would take with them if they had to live on a desert island for two years. A number of volumes were discussed, and then one young person, with a candour and honesty which made us laugh, said, 'Well, I suppose one of the books would have to be the Bible, wouldn't it?' I recall a friend of mine saying to me: 'I do read the Bible every night in bed, but I must confess that I am glad to put it down and pick up a novel.'

All this shows that we feel somehow that the Bible is important, and yet we cannot be said to relish the reading of it. Let us face some of the difficulties.

1. The Bible has been spoilt for a great many people because it has been made part of a subject which had to be 'got up' for examination purposes. Many of us have had to remember the order of the Kings of Israel. We have bullied our minds to recall all the places at which St. Paul stopped in his missionary journeys and

we have cherished the secret wish that his missionary ardour had not led him so far from home. For thousands of people a love of Shakespeare has been killed by making Shakespeare a subject to be 'crammed' at school. I fear that the same is true about the Bible. Modern methods in Sunday schools seem to me to make the teaching of religion the thrilling thing it ought to be, but in olden days the Sunday-school lesson was not a very inspiring half-hour. I remember vividly one of my own Sunday-school teachers who used to make us read round the lesson verse by verse, and then *he* turned with relief, and I can assure you we did also, to the thrilling subject of how to make an electric battery. Thus, except for the Scripture reading, the time of the Sunday-school lesson passed pleasantly away!

2. When we were exhorted to read the Bible because it was supposed to do us good spiritually, we found in adolescence that the Bible was rather like those puddings which are served out in boarding schools. They are called 'plum puddings', but the plums are often so far apart that one used to wonder how far away from the pudding the cook stood when she threw the plums in. We read chapter after chapter of dull matter, and then come to some very fine plums, full of beauty and value and meaning, but countless thousands who have made a great resolution to read the Bible through and have started valiantly with the Book of Genesis, have found their enthusiasm failing before they got to the middle of Exodus, and they generally perished in the barren desert of Leviticus.

Without doubt, the Bible is uninteresting compared with the kind of thing which a great many people are constantly reading in these days. We must at least remember that we are spoilt in this matter. There was a time when people crowded into the churches to get near the Bible when, for the first time, it was opened up to ordinary people, but in these days of exciting films, thrilling detective stories, and 'Penguins', it should be admitted straight away that the reading of the Bible will demand discipline. But, after all, is there anything in life really worthwhile which does not need a measure of self-discipline? No one plays a violin,

or learns a language, or is familiar with the names of flowers and birds without some kind of disciplined reading. Are we willing, say for the remainder of Lent, to impose upon ourselves the discipline of giving half an hour a day to the reading of the Bible?

3. Another difficulty about the Bible is that it is unattractive. As a rule it is unattractively printed in two parallel columns. But this is not its only unattractiveness. It is made unattractive by being flourished by unattractive people. I hope that that is not unkind, but it is as well to be truthful and honest, and face facts. Supposing that this evening you found that you had to share a room with another man or girl and that you were to live together for a number of months. If your bedroom mate unpacked from his luggage and sat down to read a novel, you would not be at all surprised, but if he took out a Bible and began to read it, I think you would say to yourself: 'Good heavens, I wonder what sort of a fellow I have got to live with now!' I suppose somewhere in the corridors of the mind there still lurks the ghostly memory of the old, pious humbug who always walked about with a Bible under his arm. Yet let me put over against all that a quotation from a letter received this very week from a member of this church, a young lady whom no one could charge with being dull, conventional, or stodgy. Here is it. She says: 'I am quite excited about one thing. I have been given a Moffatt and the Scripture Notes on the Daily Portions, and it is so helpful, and I am finding it really something to look forward to every day.'

4. A further difficulty which most of us have felt at some time or other is that so much of the Bible is irrelevant to life as we live it now. A great many parts of the Old Testament seem remote indeed. During my last summer holidays I was present at a little village church in the heart of a Kentish valley, at which the Vicar spent an extraordinary time in reading what I suppose was the Lesson for the day, a long chapter from the Book of Kings. I looked round at the simple village people worshipping with me, and wondered whether they could make any sense of it at all. It seemed to me to have nothing on earth to do with the kind of life

that one is called upon to live in these days. Frequently the Old Testament lessons will take us immediately from our modern, scientific world into one which is entirely strange. From this world of science we are transported into a world where axes float, where the sun stands still, where bushes burn and remain unconsumed, where a person is carried to Heaven in a chariot of fire, where food drops out of the sky for hungry people. No doubt the scholars would be able to give us rationalizations of these things, and make sense of these happenings, but we live in a world where we have to pay for all our things, where we see few exciting manifestations of the power and presence of God, and where the sky is much more likely to drop bombs than manna on hungry women and children.

5. Then there is the real difficulty that so much of the Bible is frankly quite unsuitable to be read in a modern place of worship. For instance, in the Book of Joshua (viii. 26 and x. 40) I read: 'Joshua never withdrew the hand that held his javelin until he had massacred all the people of Ai, both men and women, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded him.' And in 1 Samuel xv. 3 read that Saul was invited to 'go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass'. The story goes on to say that Saul sinned by failing to carry out the order of Heaven, and God rejected him from a kingship as a consequence. I am not making a plea that such matter should be struck out of our Bible, because it is interesting to note the development of thought, but to me it seems something approaching blasphemy to read it in public worship, at which men seek help for the daily task of living. One somehow wishes that the parson reading it would preface it by saying something like this: 'Please don't take any notice of what I am about to read, except to note how far the spirit of Jesus Christ supersedes the bloody massacres of the Old Testament, which people thought God liked before they understood Him and saw Him in Jesus.' Some of the Psalms touch a peak of devotional purity which makes them the fit expression of human aspiration for all time, but, quite frankly,

some of the Psalms sound like a complete antithesis of Christian teaching (e.g. Psalm cxxxvii. 8, 9).

6. A final difficulty which most of us have found is that which scholarship itself provides. I welcome the light which modern scholarship sheds on the Bible with all my heart, but I cannot conceal from myself that the ordinary layman who is asked to read the Bible may feel something like this: 'I don't know how to find my way in the Bible these days. I am told that this may not be an authentic part of the Book, that this has been added by a Scribe, that, although the English version says this, the original version means something altogether different, that probably this person never said the words attributed to him. I have not the time nor scholarship to enter into these problems. Scholars themselves have disputes about the meaning of some of the most important passages in the Bible, so I simply give the matter up.'

Now, what are we to say to all these difficulties? I want to say two things. First, the Bible is the word of God, and one must go on immediately to say what this means. To me it means supremely that God matters. Let us remember always that the Bible is not a single book; it is a library of books. The writers number over a hundred. They were men of different outlook, education, and temperament, and the period covered by their writings is well over a thousand years. No intelligent theory of inspiration teaches that God spoke through them as though they were machines, overwhelming their own personality: So we find incorporated their prejudices, their beliefs, their background of cosmology and astronomy and philosophy. We find in the Bible history, legend, drama, poetry, prophecy, story, parable, mystic vision—almost every kind of literature there is in the world.

Even so, we must not imagine that there would be any close parallel between this and putting together the writings of Blake, Shakespeare, Trevelyan, Bunyan, Shelley, J. R. Green, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and D. H. Lawrence. For throughout the Bible runs a golden thread, as a thread runs through a necklace, making all the separate beads into a unity, and I would call that thread, 'God matters'. The Biblical historian is less concerned with



accuracy in our sense than to show God at work. The mystic vision has not art for its end, but the glory of God. The parables and the poems are not offered as works of creative genius, but to show something of the truth of the nature of God.

Let us just take one of the forms of literature used—the poem. It seems to me that Shelley would have been almost offended if one had asked him whether he wrote a poem with any moral purpose. He was simply enshrining the beauty which he had seen in his own soul. If I remember rightly, in one of his essays Shelley protests that moral purpose would ruin poetry. Yet when you read the hundred-and-thirty-ninth Psalm, which is one of my favourites, you find that the art of the poet is subordinated to one tremendous theme. He is attempting to 'get over', as we say, the fact of the Presence of God. It is alleged that someone said: 'I don't know why anybody writes poetry, for everything he wants to say could equally well be said in prose.' But it cannot be said in prose in a way that gets over to the reader. I might say to you coldly, 'God is everywhere', and I might offer arguments for that view, but listen to this:

If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there:  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there.  
If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;  
Even there shall Thy hand lead me,  
And Thy right hand shall hold me. . . .

On the wings of beauty you are transported into the very fact of the Presence, and feel it, as what Shelley himself called, 'a truth of the emotions'. If I could so present the nature of God that you could *feel* how great God is, I should do you a much greater service than if I argued you into a belief about the greatness of God. The poet in the Bible is trying to say—God matters; God is like this; God is like that; and nothing else matters but God and your relation to Him. It could be said in prose, but you would not receive it.

And all this is true, not only of poetry, but of history and legend. The Bible begins with a beautiful legend about the

beginning of things. The whole legend is summarized in the first four words, 'In the beginning God . . .' In that lovely legend of the Creation the editor of Genesis is not trying to write a book of science. If he is still in Heaven and takes interest about the things of earth, he must often have laughed at the wrangles of our great-grandfathers as to whether every word was literally and scientifically true. He wasn't interested in science. The word meant nothing to him. He was writing that lovely parable to say that every beautiful thing we find on earth comes to us from God.

Even when we read the strange history in the Old Testament, with its tale of dreadful slaughter, yet the spirit of the Bible, if I may use the phrase, is saying to us: 'I know you feel that this is crude and gruesome, but, after all, you are being shown that men thought that God was working out a plan, even through their bloody battles. They followed the light they had. They responded to those meanings of God which they could see, and you would be a lot better to-day if you did the same. You can't say very much about the bloodshed of the Old Testament on the part of men who had never heard of Jesus, for your world is drenched with blood, although you have learnt His name. If you lived up to the Light you have, as they did, you could make a world more after God's own plan. You can't throw stones at the blood-stained warriors of the Old Testament. They were working out God's plan as far as they could understand it. You understand it so much better that you scoff at them, but you are not working it out.'

The second answer that I should like to make to the difficulties we admitted a few moments ago is that God is mediated to men in the Bible. When we read the Bible we say to ourselves: 'This concerns me.' Let us agree that this is not so convincing in certain parts of the Old Testament, and yet, if we took the proper point of view, we could find the spirit of God speaking to us almost in every part. For instance, to turn once again to the 139th Psalm, when we read the challenging words, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts', I should think not one reader in a hundred is thinking that this is a psalm of

David. Indeed, he finds that it doesn't matter to him whether David wrote it or not. The 'me' in the first sentence is not David. *It becomes the reader.* A great deal depends, of course, on how we read the Bible, the subject of our next Sunday evening sermon, but I would conclude by saying this: It is a lovely starlit night to-night. I am going to imagine that I have a fine telescope and that I invite you to come with me, so that, looking through the telescope, we may view the stars. I should be very surprised and disappointed if, instead of looking through the telescope at the amazing miracle of the night sky, you criticized the telescope, and told me that its brass wanted cleaning, and its bearings wanted oiling, and that it was almost unfit for use. The use of a telescope is that you should look through it, not at it. You may need a little help in focusing and manipulating the telescope, but he who looks too closely *at* it wastes his time.

I like to think that the same thing is true about the Bible. Its supreme value is that you should look through it to the nature of God. If you look too closely *at* it you will miss its message. After all, what more powerful and convincing answer can be given to the question, 'Why should I read the Bible?' than that Jesus Himself is offered to us in it. If you look through it and see Him, you won't ask the question, 'Why should I read the Bible?' any more. You will become part of the answer to the question yourself.

Teach me to love thy sacred word  
And view my Saviour there.

## HOW SHOULD I READ THE BIBLE?

MANY find help in the Bible Reading Fellowship,<sup>1</sup> which I should like to commend to you. I belong to it myself and find the comments on the daily reading most suggestive.

Others find help in taking a book, like one of Dr. Fosdick's, in which there is a passage to be read each day with a comment upon it, and then a longer section for each week's study.

I rather wish to speak this evening to those who want to make a beginning, or a new beginning, in Bible-reading for themselves. Concerning most books, quite a good place to begin is at the beginning! But in the case of the Bible it is the worst place to begin. I think you will agree with me that we must begin with Jesus. All that was written before Him was preparation. All that was written after Him is comment. Therefore begin with the earliest book in the Bible about Jesus, and that is the Gospel according to St. Mark. I have always held that it is best to begin with St. Mark's Gospel, and I am pleased to notice that in the new and excellent book written by Mr. E. R. Micklem,<sup>2</sup> the advice given is the same.

I regard St. Mark's Gospel as the loveliest and most precious document in the world. The real Gospel, of course, is from the first verse of the first chapter to the eighth verse of the sixteenth chapter. You may draw a line after the eighth verse of the last chapter, for the rest has been added by another hand. Probably St. Mark's Gospel was in the form of a roll which was passed round from church to church, and from reader to reader. It was very popular and the end of it became tattered and worn and finally lost. No one knows how St. Mark's Gospel originally ended.

Before you begin to read, try to have a little picture in your mind of the person who wrote it, and roughly the conditions under

<sup>1</sup> Write to the B.R.F., Victoria St., London, S.W.1.

<sup>2</sup> *A Book on the Bible for Everyman* (Hodder & Stoughton).

which he wrote. John Mark was probably only a boy of seventeen or eighteen when he became the friend of Peter. We may imagine that Peter was his hero, and both of them, of course, were great lovers of our Lord. Probably Mark's Gospel was practically dictated by Peter. Mark was the boy who followed Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane from the house at which the Last Supper was celebrated. The supper-room was probably in Mark's father's house, and I always imagine it to have been built on the flat roof. Mark I imagine to have been resting on the flat roof just outside the door of the Upper Room, so that he might be ready to warn the disciples and their Master of any danger (and the secrecy with which the Supper was arranged shows how great the danger was). The disciples were to come in separately, and they were guided to the house by a friend of Jesus, a man carrying a water jar.<sup>1</sup> Mark was also there in case the guests wanted anything. He did not intrude upon their privacy, but he was there to serve them if he were needed. When Jesus and His followers went out about 11.30 to walk through the silent streets of Jerusalem into the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark saw a look on Jesus's face which made him want to follow, and since the Garden of Gethsemane was probably Mark's father's olive orchard, there was no difficulty about Mark going with them. Indeed, the disciples seem to have gone to sleep, and it is probably to Mark that we owe the record we have of the agony in the Garden, which Mark's eyes were the only human eyes to see, and Mark's ears the only human ears to hear. Mark was probably the young man in the tomb on the Resurrection morning. The first Gospel seems to show a decided preference for angels, but Mark speaks of a young man, and there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that he was the young man who greeted the women on the first Easter morning with the triumphant words: 'He is not here. He is risen.' Mark was probably greatly loved by the early Christians. We see this in the tradition

<sup>1</sup>Women, of course, usually carried the water. The cleverness of the device is seen in that a man would be noteworthy if he carried a water-jar and yet not so conspicuous as to cause comment, since a man living alone might be seen fetching water.

that he was called the 'stump-fingered'. It is supposed that in the scuffle in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark either put out his hand in protest against Peter's flashing blade, or somehow got injured in the mêlée, for he is called, 'Mark, the stump-fingered'. He was almost certainly the young man in the linen cloth who fled away naked (Mark xiv. 51). I must not spend all the time available talking to you about Mark. We note that he has an eye for detail. We note that he tends to emphasize the human nature of our Lord. We note that he does not soften things down for the credit of the parties concerned. In these trying and difficult days when the world is drenched in blood it is interesting to recall that Mark practically certainly wrote this Gospel in Rome, shortly after one of the most awful times through which the Church passed, the persecution by Nero. This quiet Gospel was written at the time when women had been thrown to the lions, men dressed in skins soaked in oil and set alight to illumine Nero's gardens. It was written at a time when Nero had done everything he could to persecute the Church. Nero had tried, you will remember, to fix the blame for the great fire which broke out in Rome on to the Christians, and it is possible that during the very time that Mark was writing out his Gospel, his hero, Peter, was put to death. I have sometimes wondered, though it is only a fancy, whether Peter did not charge Mark with the task of writing down the facts about our Lord's life. The Gospel was written down between A.D. 65 and 70. Jesus died in A.D. 29 and the time-gap is probably due to the fact that the early Church thought that the end of the world was at hand, and the return of Jesus imminent. As this great consummation seemed to be delayed and delayed, a generation of Christians was growing up that did not know at first hand the facts about our Lord's life and death. One imagines that Peter says to Mark: 'Don't bother to write my life. That is very unimportant, but do write down all the facts I have told you about Jesus, for those who are growing up did not know Him as I did.'

I should like to suggest three ways of reading in answer to our question, 'How should I read the Bible?'

1. Read uncritically.
2. Read imaginatively.
3. Read devotionally.

Let us look at these a little more carefully.

1. Read uncritically. One of my friends took what I said last week so seriously that during the past week she read right through the Gospel according to St. Mark each evening. It is to hear a thing like that that makes preaching worth while. Another young friend of mine, a medical student, told me how much it had meant to him to take the Gospel of St. Mark and read it through in order to get a sense of the whole picture which the Book presents. That is exactly the kind of uncritical reading that I wish to suggest we should do. I am not, of course, trying to put you off from any critical inquiry you may care to make, but if you allow your mind to stick, say, at the miracles, or at some interpretation of a difficult passage, you will not get the message of the Book in the way I want you to get it from a first reading. In a sentence, you will not see the wood for the trees.

I know very little about art, but I am quite sure that at the first sight of a picture one should not go very close to it and concentrate on some detail; one should stand away from it and let the picture as a whole make its impression upon one's mind. So I suggest we should read St. Mark's Gospel right through, if possible at a sitting, glossing over the difficulties, just letting some things remain *sub judice*. Say to yourself concerning them, 'I will come back and examine them later', but first of all read uncritically, so that you see not details, but a Person at work in a human setting and dealing with men and women like ourselves.

After all, just because the Gospels are human documents, we may expect that in details there will be matters which we shall never be asked to take as evidence of divine inspiration. Remember that Mark himself was trying to remember what Peter told him. Peter was trying to remember what Jesus said and did. Now, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, Mark wrote down his Gospel in Greek, and for us the Greek has had to be translated into English, so we shall not expect to have the kind of accuracy which a short-

hand transcription would give us. No doubt in St. Mark's Gospel we are very close to what Jesus said, and any one clever enough to make up what Jesus said would have to be another Jesus. At the same time, when you come to study the difficulties of detail, you must make allowance for the human factor. All the Gospel writers have their peculiar prejudices. For instance, the first Gospel seeks to see very many things in terms of the fulfilment of prophecy which really do not bear that interpretation at all. When Jesus is carried back from Egypt by His parents as a tiny little child, St. Matthew says, 'Thus it was fulfilled that was spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son"', but when those words were originally spoken they had nothing to do with an infant Messiah returning from the south. In a similar way, in relation to the woman with the haemorrhage, one of the Gospel writers says that she tried many doctors and, instead of getting better, spent all her money and only grew worse. But Luke was a physician, so we find that he is not going to be a party to such a slur on the profession, and he conveniently leaves that out! But in your first reading don't let questions or criticism crop up in your mind, and just try to let the whole picture of Jesus which Mark gives us make its own impression upon your mind. That is of tremendous importance, because afterwards you will judge all your Bible reading by your picture of Jesus. You will not, if you are wise, judge Jesus by the Bible, you will judge the Bible by Jesus, and so it is all-important to have your central picture of Jesus clear in your mind. As Mr. Micklem says in his book: 'If we are perfectly sure of Jesus we can be content to be uncertain about a lot of other matters.'

2. Then I want to suggest that we read imaginatively. There is a great word of John Ruskin which runs: Let us when we read the Bible try 'to be present, as if in the body, at each recorded event in the life of the Redeemer'.

When I say read imaginatively, I mean imagine that you are there watching. Use any travel you have been able to have, or any reading you have been able to do, to make a vivid picture of the setting of the incidents about which you read in St. Mark's



Gospel. See Jesus, not as a stained-glass Figure, unreal and remote, but a sun-tanned, healthy Man, standing there on the pebbles of the beach of Galilee, with the blue waves breaking on the shore, and the green hills behind Him, and the lovely azure sky above His head, dressed, I suppose, in a blue robe, with dark, long hair, with flashing eyes and kindly face, the kind of person to whom little children would run. See Him standing there, with His fearless eyes, His strong, attractive, serene personality, and then read the story as if you too had crept up behind the crowd, and were peering over someone's shoulder and listening to His voice. Don't be afraid of the humour of the Gospel story. Again and again Jesus made the people laugh, as when He told the story of a Pharisee drinking soup and straining out a gnat, and then swallowing a camel. Or a man lighting his lamp and putting it under the bed, and so on. Try, if you will, to pretend that you have never read the story before, and let it make its own impression upon your imagination. Then you will not find that Jesus presents you with arguments, but with pictures. I am sure it is legitimate to read imaginatively, for Jesus almost always spoke in pictures which demanded the use of the imagination.

A certain lawyer comes to Him and asks a question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Jesus gives no definition of what a neighbour is, let alone a definition in legal language, but at the end of the interview the person who asked the question knows what a neighbour is, and he gets it from a picture story. A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. It is the most dangerous road in Palestine. You can still get held up on that road. He fell among thieves. . . . The story unwinds itself. A certain Samaritan. . . . So you see, when Jesus was asked the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' His answer was the story about a foreigner, and, moreover, the most despised foreigner of all, a Samaritan, a word a Jew would not use.

3. My third point is that you should read devotionally. You are not asking for information. You are trying to meet a Person who wants to meet you. There are all sorts of ways in which Jesus can come through to us, but I think this is one of the most wonderful.

If you read, for instance, in St. Luke's Gospel, the story of Zacchaeus, you will find that at the end, if you have read uncritically, imaginatively, and devotionally, that you have not been reading so much a story about Jesus and Zacchaeus; you have been reading a story about Jesus and you. Here is this little man, despised, with a dreadful inferiority complex, such as little people often seem to have. This little man is hated by all kinds of people. He is a tax-gatherer. He takes money from his own countrymen and passes some of it to Rome. He is despised and possibly despicable. Then he hears about Jesus. He stands on the edge of the crowd. He cannot see through them, and cannot push his way through them. You know what crowds are like. You know how people hate you if you try to push through a crowd. Try now to feel their hatred for this little renegade.

So Zacchaeus goes into a garden behind the crowd and climbs up into a sycamore tree. How the little Jewish boys must have laughed at him! What an undignified and ungainly business it must have been! Then Jesus comes down the road with His disciples. Here is the only Rabbi in all Palestine who does not despise tax-gatherers. He looked up, stopped, called to Zacchaeus. You can almost imagine Zacchaeus, with his heart beating more quickly, shrinking back amongst the leaves, and then the most lovely voice in the world says, 'Zacchaeus, I am going to have dinner with you', and they walk away together, and the lovely story proceeds. Jesus makes no criticism of Zacchaeus. It is Zacchaeus who says, 'I have got to do something about the extortionate demands I have made in the past'.

But if you are reading in the proper way, you are in the crowd too, and, having read, you put down your New Testament and you begin to meditate. Here is a person whom the rest of the world, in as far as it knew him, hated and despised, but Jesus loved him and believed in him, and won him. It may occur to you that there is no one in the world whom Jesus would scorn, or for whom He would show contempt. He would have dinner with Hitler. Jesus must hate the atrocities of the Nazis more than we hate them, but has it ever occurred to us that Jesus loves the Nazis

as much as He loves us, because He loves all sinners even while He hates their sins. Then as we meditate on our Scripture reading, it begins to dawn on us that if we are nursing resentment against another person, however despicable his conduct may have been, we have really never seen Jesus. If I may put it this way, we have never seen Jesus with Zacchaeus. If we think God loves an Englishman better than a Nazi, we have never seen Jesus with Zacchaeus. We may have read the story again and again and again, but we have never read the Bible in the proper way, for this is not merely an historic story of Jesus and Zacchaeus. This is the word of God to all men for all time.

Further, my friend, if you hate yourself and despise yourself and think that you are no use to anybody, and that nobody loves you, you go home and read the story of Zacchaeus again, and you will hear Jesus say to you, 'I want to come and live with you', and you will perhaps be wise enough to open your heart to Him, for He loves you when you hate yourself. He forgives you when you can't forgive yourself. He believes in you when you no longer believe in yourself, and don't know anybody that does believe in you. You will catch hold of self-respect again. You will hold your head up, as indeed you well might, because Jesus loves you and cares for you, and His touch upon your life can heal you, and bring you back to healthy ways of living, new ways of loving, definite ways of serving. You can become the kind of man He means you to be, because, however despised or despicable, Jesus's hand is on your shoulder, and He is saying to you, 'I am coming to live in your house'.

So we might take story after story in the New Testament. I wish there were time to take more. For myself, I love the story of old Nicodemus going to Jesus by night. Here is a chance for you to let your imagination paint a picture—the moonlight, the old man stumbling along. He does not think that Jesus can tell him much, but if there is any more to be learnt he is willing to learn. A fine type of old religious teacher. I imagine those two sitting in an upper room at the house where Jesus was staying in Jerusalem. I imagine the evening breeze rustling the vine leaves on the

trellis that is fixed up outside the house. I imagine Jesus telling Nicodemus that, for all his learning, he has got to start all over again, like a little child, and begin at the beginning. Then I think, as the evening breeze sweeps past the house, Jesus flings open the window and says, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so'—as He flings the window open—'is every one that is born of the spirit'.

Why, if you are reading uncritically, imaginatively, devotionally, you find yourself saying: 'My word, I have got to open a few more windows in my life. I find that knowing the facts about religion is nothing to do with it. I have got to experience the breath of the Spirit in my heart, and I have been keeping a great many windows closed. My business life could do with the fresh air of the Spirit blowing through it. I find that I am a good Christian everywhere except in my home, and that's no sort of good at all. I find that I have never let God in on my prejudices. I have never let the Holy Spirit of God blow away my hatreds and resentments. I find I've never let God in on my sex life.' And so as you read the story of Nicodemus you will find that he fades into the background, and you, in some quiet, imaginative upper room, are sitting there talking to Jesus yourself, and Jesus is looking at you with eyes full of love, and He is telling you just where you have got to begin all over again. And if you are a wise man you will finish that hour of Bible-reading on your knees and you will be saying, 'O God, show me how to open all the windows of my being, that Thy healthful Spirit of love may sweep into my stuffy heart'.

Who said that reading the Bible was dull, and uninteresting, and unattractive, and irrelevant, and unsuitable? If we read the Gospels from now till the end of our summer holidays, we might be changed men and women. If we will only read uncritically, imaginatively, and devotionally.

Let me conclude with a true story. A little boy said to his father, having worried for long in secret about this question: 'Father, has anybody ever seen God?' His father answered in a

way so curt that the laddie could ask no further questions. As it happened, the minister was coming to tea that day, and the little boy thought to himself, 'Well, he ought to know. I'll ask him'. So very shyly, when he found himself alone with the minister for a few moments, he tugged the latter's sleeve and said, 'Has anybody ever seen God? How can you see God?' In a very pompous voice, the minister said, 'No one can see God and live.' Poor little chap! He slunk away and went out into the garden and cried just a little out of sheer disappointment.

The boy used to go fishing with an old man. One day his father said to him, 'Who is this fellow you go fishing with? Is he all right?' The little boy said, 'I think he is all right, Daddy. The other evening when we came back down the river I noticed that as he looked at the sunset his eyes filled with tears.' His father made no comment, but at any rate no criticism.

One evening, as the old man and the boy were returning from a fishing expedition, the sunset was even more glorious than ever. They drifted slowly down the river, both completely silent.

At last the little chap nudged the old man and said shyly, 'I never meant to ask anybody else this question, but I want to ask you. Can you see God?' The old man turned to the boy a face shining with joy, his eyes full of tears. After a pause, he said: 'Laddie, sometimes I think as I never sees anything else.'

I expect I am speaking to a great many people who have been endlessly exhorted to read the Bible, and have either never made a beginning or else given it up. May I suggest that you go back to Mark's Gospel, read it uncritically, imaginatively, and devotionally. The boy, in the story I have just told, saw God through the eyes of a fisherman, with whom he spent much time. That is what happened in St. Mark's case. He was just a boy. He spent much time with one whom he greatly admired, who was a fisherman called Peter. He listened to the stories Peter told. He watched Peter's face. He saw God. Mark has a message for you. There will come a moment, sooner or later, when you will see God, the God whom Jesus revealed, and that will be the most wonderful moment of your life.

## THE SECRET MINISTRIES OF GOD

The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. (*Psalm cxxviii. 8.*)

He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ. (*Philippians i. 6.*)

So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, *he knoweth not how.* (*Mark iv. 26.*)

ONE of the greatest facts about the grace of God in dealing with our souls is commonly overlooked. We stress, and rightly, the necessity on man's part of opening his life to God, of 'accepting Christ as his Saviour', of the necessity of spiritual discipline, of the need for daily readjustment. We stress, on the other hand, God's endless grace through the Sacrament, the worship of His House, the response of God to our private prayers, the reading of the Bible, and, above all, the power that comes to human lives through the loving companionship of Jesus Christ.

But beyond all this there is an agency at work, silently and secretly, when once the spirit of man has been opened to God, and indeed often when no conscious response has taken place, which seems to me to be the spiritual counterpart of the *vis medicatrix naturæ* of the body and the mind, the healing force of Nature, the secret, integrating work of God to make the human organism perfect and complete.

A man who is cured through a doctor by means of a treatment or a surgical operation will commonly say that he was cured by Dr. X. It is a convenient way of speaking, but it is wholly untrue, and most doctors—all sensible ones!—would agree. All doctors would do well to take to heart a pregnant sentence of the most distinguished physician of antiquity after Hippocrates, the famous Galen, the devout Greek doctor who practised in Rome about A.D. 164: 'I bound his wounds, but God healed him.' No one has ever healed another. Where would any healer be without

the secret force by which severed tissue is united, disease overcome, and by which the body and mind move toward the restoration of health?

The passage from the Psalm before us is a plea that God will 'perfect' or—a better translation—'complete' the work begun in the psalmist's soul, that the Divine Artist will not 'forsake' or—again a better translation—'discard' the work of His own hands that He has begun.

The Psalmist, could he have heard it, would have been greatly comforted by St. Paul's unequivocal assurance to the Philippians, that 'He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ'.

A charming story is told of Sir Hubert von Herkomer, the painter and sculptor, who founded the Herkomer school of painting at Bushey in 1883. His aged father, who had brought his son at the age of eight from their Bavarian home, was persuaded to spend the last years of his life with his distinguished son. The father, also a sculptor, asked for clay that he might while away the evenings in modelling. But, what with age and enfeeblement and failing sight, the old man would put aside his work at night almost in despair. He could not make it what he wanted to make it. The actuality was so distressingly far below the vision that the old man would go to bed quite sad. But after the father had gone to bed, his son would go and work secretly at the clay. In the morning the father would look at his work of the previous evening and, never knowing that another hand had touched it, would exclaim with delight: 'Why, it isn't as bad as I thought!' . . . 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.' . . . 'I shall be satisfied when I awake, with Thy likeness.' . . . We can say these comforting things to ourselves, for God has secret ministries which carry on the work on our own nature which we would fain do but cannot.

1. Here is one of God's secret ministries, which, like the loving toil of Herkomer, operates during the night when we are fast

asleep. It is grand to see in a law of psychology a secret ministry of God.

This law states that the dominant idea of the mind, before sleep ensues, goes on working, like yeast in dough, through the depth of the unconscious mind, when consciousness has closed down for the night.

How tremendously important then is it to determine what our last thoughts at night are! What wise, if unconscious, psychologists were our parents and grandparents, who told us to say our prayers last thing at night! How sound was the intuition which led St. Paul to write to the Ephesians: 'Let not the sun go down upon your exasperation' (iv. 26). Sundown was sleepy-time. Don't let anger fill your mind at bedtime!

I have read of a professor who was trying to work out an abstruse mathematical problem and who wakened one morning to find to his own amazement that during sleep he had taken pencil and paper and gone on with the problem to its final conclusion. A bank manager once told me that he went to sleep repeatedly turning over some problem relative to his accounts and frequently found that the missing figure, or entry, was immediately apparent on awakening. Wise preachers know that if they go to sleep over their sermon on Saturday night they can keep the people awake with it on Sunday morning! It has gone on working and seems to have soaked itself into the very fibre of the preacher's mind.

There is the danger of evil being done by the law's working as is the case with all law. The law of gravity which brings down the beneficent rain to our fields will bring about the death of him who walks over the cliff edge. And this law of psychology, by which the mind is stained the colour of its last dominating thoughts before sleep, can bring us near to hell. Don't let the mind brood on lustful thoughts or lust will colour area after area of your thought-life and lead to immoral action. Don't let the mind brood on anger, resentment, jealousy, hate or the thought-life will become embittered, and remember: 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.' Don't let fear, pessimism, or doubt hold the mind



in tyranny just before sleep, for those thoughts are seeping into the very nature all night long.

Note rather how the right use of this law is one of the secret ministries of God. For a time some of us at my home made a practice, at the end of the day, of definitely calling to mind the most beautiful thing we had seen or heard that day and making it the closing thought. It might be a vase of snowdrops, or a bird's song, trees against the sky, the sunset light reflected on the snow, an old woman feeding the greengrocer's pony, anything that was beautiful, unselfish, brave, kind, holy. 'Whatsoever things are true and lovely and pure', said St. Paul, '*keep on thinking about these things*' (Philippians iv. 8). Your mind then is stained that colour, steeped in that quality. And remember that your whole reaction to life depends on the state of that mind.

So during the night, God, working through His own law—for all law is His—is moulding your character as Herkomer moulded his father's clay, and when you wake up you will be a better man than when you went to sleep. You will prove in your experience the truth of a sentence of the Psalmist which is grievously mistranslated. We read: 'He giveth His beloved sleep.' He does, but the correct translation is even more significant: 'So He giveth *to* His beloved *in* sleep' (Psalm cxxvii. 2, *R.V.* margin). Offer the mind, last thing at night, that positive affirmation which is the soul's deepest need and which may be the very opposite of your present condition, and in the unconscious hours the mind will move towards it and lay hold of it and gradually capture the quality you desire. It is one of the secret ministries of God.

2. Here is another, though each should form a separate sermon. In 'A Death in the Desert', Browning makes St. John say that he—

... patient stated much of the Lord's life  
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.

Some people are very troubled because there is so much they forget. What we must not forget is that forgetting is the highest

function of the memory! Sanity is maintained by the forgetting power of the memory! I am certain that my own sanity would go if I could not forget some of the stories of human misery that I have heard. But sometimes we are distressed because we cannot remember. People read a book, or hear a sermon, or pick up some helpful thought, and they cannot remember it, cannot bring it all back again to consciousness, and imagine its influence is lost.

Now, a good memory must be a very nice thing to have, and I favour all methods which improve it. I believe in jotting things down which I want to remember, and please, never hesitate in Church to write down anything you want to recall.

But one of the most interesting discoveries of modern psychology is that once the mind really lays hold of an impression it never lets it go. It may fall into the deep mind so that, operating from the surface, you cannot reach it and recover it to consciousness. But it is there in the mind and it is influencing the mind and therefore influencing behaviour in all those situations relevant to the thought received.

Experiments in hypnotism show that under certain conditions of deep hypnosis a patient can bring back to conscious memory incidents that happened in the first year of life. In my own work, it was found that a very susceptible patient actually went back gradually in memory to her own birth and described the whole happening.

Now see how important that law is when we think of spiritual things. After all, it can be illustrated from the physical plane. You don't *remember* what you had for dinner a fortnight ago, but it did you good. It mingled with the tissue of the body and was dealt with in that amazing laboratory and turned into energy and power, including the power to think. What an intriguing thought that rice pudding last Tuesday helped to make this sermon!

So the truths which your mind accepts may be forgotten, but once really received they pass into the substance—as it were—of the personality, and *even if never consciously remembered again*, they determine the kind of personality you are, and what is more, they determine the kind of reaction you make to life. You can't find

the sugar and catch it in your spoon after a very few moments, but the tea is sweet. That is what God wants. 'Truth in the inward parts.' The whole mind remains sweetened with the eternal truths which have the power to make us true men and women, even long after the particular form in which those truths were presented to consciousness is forgotten and may be never recovered.

How important then becomes what we read, what we hear and receive. One of the greatest obstacles to the making of a new world is that German youth has become the incarnation of the ideas on which German minds have been fed. But that is the misuse of God's law. One of His secret ministries lies in the fact that *truth* admitted to the personality goes on working silently and secretly, making the personality gradually the incarnation of itself.

3. I believe that the way beauty is similarly absorbed is another secret ministry of God. We may not be able to recall a single picture on the walls of our childhood's home. But those pictures have affected us. I would counsel newly-married people to buy pictures slowly and buy one good picture rather than fill the walls with rubbish. The pictures on schoolroom walls have a much profounder influence than we commonly imagine.

The hill-men of India are quite different from the rice coolies of the plains—tougher, more tolerant, with a keener sense of humour and a steadier bearing. I find it hard to believe that the glory and majesty of the Himalayas have had nothing to do with character. Gardeners, farmers, shepherds, and countryfolk who work in the open and hear the birds all day long, who tend flowers or sheep, who see God's open sky and watch wind-driven clouds, seem different in outlook from the City merchant driving the close bargain, living out of sight of everything that God made, letting business success bulk far too largely on his horizon and take from him so much energy that there is none left for God and the true enjoyment of simple things. Even the first snowdrop moves him less than a fall in the price of lard. What a tragedy it is when any one, rich or poor, is so obsessed with the means of life that he loses sight of the meaning of life. Many people are not really

living. They don't know how to. They are *earning a living*, that's all.

He who keeps a little place in his life for beauty will find that it does something for him and in him, and that something is a process that goes on when the beauty is no longer before his eyes and ears, like a seed growing secretly in the dark. God, by a secret ministry, can turn the sight of a snowdrop into hope and the sight of the dawn into courage. A concert can do something spiritual within us, as well as a prayer meeting. Slip into St. Paul's one day and look at the original of Holman Hunt's 'The Light of the World'. It will do for you as much as many a sermon. One of the finest services held in the City Temple last year was a service without a sermon or address, when a large congregation on Good Friday afternoon heard our own Choir interpret Stainer's *Crucifixion*. When Jesus called men out into the wilderness to rest, it was not for sleep and lethargy so much as to see the birds and flowers and sky and sea, to have, after the demands of a hectic multitude, time to experience the secret, healing ministry of Beauty.

4. Time prevents any adequate dealing with one of the greatest of God's secret ministries. Let us just name it. Have you ever tried to analyse just what it is in friendship which is so utterly satisfying? Was it not Carlyle and Emerson who forgathered for an evening together and sat utterly silent for hours until one rose to go and said: 'We've had a grand evening!' It may be with one closely related to us or it may be with one who is—as we stupidly say—'just a friend', but we have all, I hope, had hours of communion when something from our friend's very nature has passed into ours, and perhaps from us to him or her, bringing strength where there was weakness, comfort where there was distress, hope and courage where there was despair or even defeat. There is something mysterious about friendship. You may walk for an hour with a person and say certain things and the hour may be one of boredom and fatigue. You may walk with a friend over the same ground for the same length of time and even say the same

things, and at the end of the hour be exhilarated and refreshed. Through the friendship, a hidden ministry of God is at work, integrating and building up the personality.

We can go farther. We get strength from a friend who is far away and whom we rarely, if ever, see or even write to. The very fact of the friendship, the thought that you *have* that friend and that he is *there*, is a secret ministry of God to your spirit, one of the ways in which God's spirit operates on our lives. As Browning fearlessly puts it:

... Hush, I pray you!  
What if this friend happen to be—God?

My friends, God is ceaselessly at work in our lives. There is the pull of 'original sin' the other way, but God loves us, not only as a Father, certainly not only as an Assessor of morals, but as a great Artist who will not leave creative work unfinished. He will perfect that which concerneth us. Deep in our nature, His secret ministries are at work, like the mystic power that makes a seed grow, and it will be well if we remember that God is far more eager and constant in His desire for perfection in us than we have ever been.

Much we must do ourselves. The frail barrier of our misused will can hinder Him. But if at last we become what we, in our best moments desire, and what He wants us to be, it will be not through our own efforts, but through all the varied ministries of His grace, and not least those secret effects of the laws of our own being by which we assimilate and partake of the Divine.

Let me close with some appropriate and beautiful words from a pamphlet by Dr. Maltby called *God in Everything—The Letters of Miriam Gray*<sup>1</sup>:

'In His mysterious humility He tends the last smouldering lamp in every rebellious heart. He is, we find, the friend of every hard-pressed generosity in a base heart. It is He who defends the last strip of territory against the invasion of passion when all the

<sup>1</sup> The Epworth Press.

rest is gone, and raises mysterious defences about beleaguered virtues whose doom seemed sure. When He is denied or unrecognized in His own person, He still lingers about a man, dimly apprehended as a sense of duty, or as some indestructible principle, some notion of what is "not cricket", some code of thieves; or He returns upon us in some New Thought, some shadowy Infinite, some impersonal Life-Force, some half-crazy system worshipping its fragment of truth; and so men entertain Him unawares. These vast tracts of the unbaptized human life we make over to poets and novelists and dramatists, who explore them with inexhaustible interest and sympathy. Yet that interest and sympathy come from God, who loves this human life of ours, not only as a moralist approving where it is good and disapproving where it is bad, but as a poet or an artist loves it, because He cannot help loving a thing so strange, piteous, and enthralling as the story of every human soul must be.

## THE GOD OF DETAIL

TO the religious man there is no such thing as a detail, if, by detail, you mean an incident which is so trivial that it cannot hold spiritual significance.

Imagine a professor of philosophy sitting down to his desk to work at his lecture for the following day. Like some other people I know, he cannot work at an untidy desk. So he proceeds to clear away the papers strewn upon it, papers which have been put there probably by a lady, who, like someone else I know, acts on the principle, 'When you don't know what to do with pamphlets, magazines, handbills, and the rest of the clutter that gets pushed through the letter-box, put it on father's desk'. The professor picks up a magazine published by the Paris Missionary Society. He is about to throw it into the waste-paper basket, when, on mechanically opening it, his eye catches the title of an article, 'The Needs of the Congo Mission'. The professor reads it through and puts it down. In his diary that night, he wrote the words, 'My search is over'.

The professor was Dr. Albert Schweitzer, and the 'chance' reading of a missionary report took one of the most scholarly and gifted men in Europe to study medicine at the university in which he was a professor and then spend his life in Equatorial Africa. Though he has a doctor's degree in Philosophy, Theology, Medicine and Music, his best years have been given to a mission station, Lambarené, in French Equatorial Africa.

I wonder what the person thought afterwards who pushed the magazine through Schweitzer's door. I wonder whether he was a bit tired that afternoon and nearly decided not to bother with the remaining houses in that street. What a detail seems one magazine more or less! Yet see what an immense issue depended on it. It makes one want to do one's best down to the last detail, doesn't

it? For there is no such thing as a detail with God. And the more we share His mind and see His world as He sees it, the less ready we are to say concerning anything: 'Oh, that's a mere detail.' So often a detail decides a destiny.

Readers of the life of Grenfell of Labrador will remember that his admirers saved up to give him a motor boat so that his fine service to the people living in the islands off the coast might be facilitated. Soon after the boat arrived, Dr. Grenfell received an urgent summons in the night. It was dark and foggy, but he had his good motor boat and its compass. So he started happily enough. To make a thrilling story very short, long after the time had elapsed when, by all his reckoning, he should have reached the island he sought, his men saw looming up in front of his boat a dangerous rock standing up in the sea which they knew was miles down the coast and quite in the wrong direction. After the harassing night—in which a mother lost her life—examination was made and inquiries were set on foot, and at last it was found that a young lad had been entrusted in Liverpool with the task of fastening the compass to its wooden base. He lost one of the brass screws and used a steel one. The compass apparently was not tested after fixing, and the lack of one brass screw cost a life, and nearly cost the life of one of the finest men of our time.

As we say to the children: 'For lack of a nail a shoe was lost. For lack of a shoe a horse was lost. For lack of a horse a rider was lost. For lack of a rider a message was lost. For lack of a message a battle was lost. For lack of a battle a kingdom was lost.'

After all, what is a detail? I was once asked by a friend, with whom I shared a bungalow in India, to deliver a note to a Girl's Boarding School in Madras. It was a mere detail to make a short detour on a journey I had to make in any case. But the lady who came out on to the veranda that sunny morning, and whom I then met for the first time, is now my wife!

But my message is not merely that we must do our work thoroughly down to its smallest detail, because we never know what might hang upon it. That is a message and an important one



which I hope may help those whose whole lives are spent in what others miscall details; such as making beds, cooking meals, washing up, tending a machine, adding up figures, wrapping up purchases and the like. That message is a by-product of what I think is a deeper message still, and one which it is most important to understand.

It is, in brief, that we must be careful not to affix the label 'detail' to anything, since nothing is 'a mere detail' to God, and He uses what we call detail in such a remarkable way.

It is very human, and, I suppose, inevitable that we should use the word 'detail', but to do so in regard to God is to fall into the mistake of anthropomorphism. (The Greek word *anthropos* means 'man' and the word *morphe* means 'form'.) Anthropomorphism is the mistake of thinking of God in terms of a man—a very powerful, wise, loving, and, indeed, ideal man, but still a man.

Now, Jesus Himself taught us thus to think. Again and again when He was telling men what God was like, He began a story thus: 'A certain man had two sons. . . .' 'If you want to know what God is like', said Jesus in effect, 'think of a perfect man and your picture will be as true as you can make it.' But Jesus always made it clear that God was like man *in the realm of moral values, not in the realm of creative power*. The truth that God made man in His own image is no authority for man limiting His thought of God to the purely human concepts.

Man obviously cannot do the sort of thing God does in the realm of power. Man cannot make stars or the mechanisms by which a baby laughs. God, on the other hand, is not like man; He requires no rest, no information. He is not—as man is—located only in one place. He is not imprisoned in time or space. So we might go on. Let it be sufficient to sum up in inspired words: 'My thoughts are *not* your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.'<sup>1</sup>

The editor of the Book of Genesis fell into the mistake of anthropomorphism when he wrote: 'God rested the seventh day'—save, of course, that such a phrase was part of his parabolic way

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lv. 8.

of speaking of Creation. To think of God 'resting' is really as foolish as thinking of God sitting back and drinking tea. Infinite activity knows no rest. He 'neither slumbers nor sleeps'.<sup>1</sup> If He did, the whole universe would disintegrate at once and be no more. In Him all things consist<sup>2</sup> or hold together.

It follows, therefore, that nothing is 'hard' to God except winning men whom He Himself has given the free-will which they use against Him. But even there the 'hardness' is caused by man. It is not caused by any lack of power in God. The words 'hard' and 'easy' are man's words. If God can do a thing at all, i.e. if it is a normal function of infinite power and wisdom and goodness to do a thing, why, then, God can do it. Not without *cost*—for every expression of love is costly. Not without what we in our prison call time. But certainly *without exhaustion*.

'With God,' said Jesus, 'all things are possible.' There are many things God *must* not do. There are many things that would deny His own nature, remembering that perfect wisdom is included in His nature. These are many things that we ask Him to do, which are as impossible as making a square circle, i.e. they are contradictory. What makes them impossible is not His lack of power. If we understood His nature better we should see them to be self-contradictory, and, like the phrase 'square circle', meaningless.

A little boy once asked his mother if God made flies. On receiving an affirmative answer, he said, 'Oh, Mummy, it must be a ticklish business making flies!' The little boy was guilty of anthropomorphism. But to God that kind of 'hardness' is unknown. To put it crudely, God didn't sit back after making elephants and say: 'Well, that was a heavy day's work. I think I'm entitled to a rest.'

The point of all this is that we simply must not get our human difficulties about size into our thinking about God. Making a star is not a heavier task than making a dewdrop.

Now see how relevant this is to life and to our thought about life. Launching a planet is not, to God, a 'bigger' affair, a matter of greater concern to God, than watching over your baby's illness.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxxi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Colossians i. 17.

God is as much interested in the fact that it is your washing-day to-morrow as He is that He is going—for all we know—to create a new world from some flaming sun of which we've never heard. One is not a 'little thing' and the other a 'big thing'. Those are human words.

God is pouring out His omnipotence at every part of His creation and all that happens, happens to Him. 'For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.'<sup>1</sup> He is not looking on, like a big Man from above. He is the Body of which we are part. Will you misunderstand if I put it like this? He knows it is your washing-day to-morrow because it is His. It is His because it is yours. Your life is an extension of His own and, in a real sense, what happens to you happens to Him.

Look at all this in relation to the problem of God's guidance. People will believe that God is guiding 'in a general sort of way'. They find it hard to believe that He has any sort of interest or concern in the details of that guidance.

But, you see, there are no 'details'. The significance of one thing may turn out to be greater than the significance of another thing, but as between the things themselves there is no great nor small. Indeed, a screw may be a big thing, and an article in a magazine may hold greater spiritual significance than, say, a whole session of Parliament, or a speech of Hitler, or the meetings of the Congregational Assembly, or even the Methodist Conference in all its glory.

God, you see, is *not* like man in His activities. He is *not* a managing director who steers a business on general lines, but can know no details; who does not even know the office boy's name. God is *not* like a General who directs a campaign, but knows nothing of the wounds of Private Smith, or his ultimate death, or the sorrow of his widow. When little Margaret Smith, aged ten, learns the terrible news and soaks her pillow with tears, sobbing through the endless night because Daddy is dead, God—if it can be put into words—is not in Heaven looking on and saying:

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 28.

'Well, of course, war involves casualties.' Certainly He is not looking down sternly and saying: 'Well, if men will do these things, they must take the consequences.' God—if it can, I say, be put into words—is on that bed holding Margaret in His arms, and God is crying too. And Private Smith's wounds are His wounds, and the widow's torn heart is His own. All persons are an extension of His personality. For in Him we live and move and have our being.

'Surely He hath *borne* our griefs and *carried* our sorrows.' 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father.' Two sparrows! Well, surely that's a detail! What about world unrest and the threat of war that would involve millions? Yes! but the millions are in His hands as well as the sparrows. 'Large'—'small': they are man's words. 'Infinite' means without end. And greatness *without end* doesn't measure things as we do. It is perfectly adequate to every situation. 'Fear not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.'<sup>1</sup> Not because we are bigger, but because in the realm of creative values we can do more. Sparrows are servants and men are sons. We are not to be conceited at the thought of sparrows, or frightened at the thought of stars, but happy that through *every* part of His creation, without regard to our labels of important or unimportant, large or small, the unceasing activity of God goes on.

We say: 'He is such a great man that he cannot be troubled with detail.' 'He is such a great general that you can't expect him to be bothered with the rank and file.' But of God you must say: 'The word "detail" in regard to Him is as foolish as the word "eating"'. He is so different from man and so great that His heart holds them all, and His Spirit can take what we call a tiny detail and fill it with spiritual meaning.'

In an English city some months ago a broken-hearted woman sat on a seat in a public park. Why did she go to that park that morning? Why did she sit on that seat? For next to her sat a man who was reading a book. Why did he go to the park that morning?

<sup>1</sup>Matthew x. 29-31.

Why did he sit on that seat? Why was he reading that book at that time?

She looked over his book and saw the title of the chapter at the head of the page. 'Sir,' she said, 'excuse me, but the title of your book makes me wish I could read it. May I write down the name of the author?' 'Certainly,' said he, 'but better than that, I know the author, and if you like I will give you a note and he will help you, for I see you are in trouble.' So a woman was rejoined to her husband, a quarrel was healed, a home was restored, little children found happiness and their birthright—for their birthright is a home where peace reigns and where father and mother love one another—and it was a mere detail, you say, that took those two to that park and that seat and that book? I don't think so. I think it was the loving planning of God, the God of detail.

So mind how you speak of details. On what small hinges big doors swing. Look out for *spiritual significance*, not the things men call important, big, impressive. The Oxford Groupers are as right when they remain sensitive to the thought that God can guide them in 'details' as they are wrong if they seek with emphasized enthusiasms to win the 'important' people to their way of thinking.

What a lot of surprises there will be for us in Heaven! Hudson Taylor says that in his opinion the conversion of a whole village in China depended on the prayers of an unknown woman in an English country village! I know a woman who persuaded another to begin to pray. Supposing the second marries and has a son and teaches him to pray. And supposing he is a St. Paul! Yet the first woman often says she does nothing for God and lives her life in humdrum details.

Let us not be 'anthropomorphic' any more! Let us realize that God is greater than all our thoughts of Him based on the nature of man. If we try to think less as man does and more as God does, we shall pour our Christian spirit into every detail and see in detail thrilling adventure, new opportunities, and the signposts of God. We shall watch for His meanings and find a new romance in unsuspected significance.

He who, with equal ease can make an ant or an Atlantic, and who pours Himself out in all His fullness into every part of His universe, knowing nothing of a scorn for detail, asks from us that we surrender every part of life to Him, watching for His message to flash even from the trivial.

'I come in the little things', saith the Lord. Watch therefore, for in such a detail as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.

## GOD'S INTOLERABLE COMPLIMENT

SOME time ago, in the old City Temple, I offered to you, in a sermon on 'Faith's Supreme Certainty', one little sentence which I should like to develop this morning. It was to the effect that, throughout the whole Bible, suffering is frequently referred to under the figure of fire. We noted the point that the very use of the word 'fire' involves a compliment to human nature, for that which the fire does must be worth doing and the substance on which the fire acts cannot be destroyed, but must be purified by its action. A compliment indeed to the indestructible nature of that valuable substance on which the fire operates. In a sentence, fire points to gold, not wood. If our nature were thought of as straw or paper or wood, fire would entirely destroy it. The fact that suffering is called 'fire' involves by implication that human nature is gold, or, at any rate, something that can be purified by the action of the fire. So to grasp the thought of suffering as fire is really to receive a compliment from God. It is this thought that I wish to discuss with you this morning.

My interest in our theme was quickened by reading a book recently published called *The Problem of Pain*, by Mr. C. S. Lewis. The phrase 'God's intolerable compliment' is one of his. Here is its context: 'It is for people whom we care nothing about that we demand happiness on any terms; with our friends, our lovers, our children, we are exacting and would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes. . . . And God has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.'

We do see all around us, in these days, widespread suffering both of individuals and whole nations, and, as we have often said to one another, it is only misleading to think of that suffering as the

will of God. It is within God's will in that He allows it and uses it, but it is not God's will in the sense that He intends it. I believe it is essential to clear thinking to keep those two points separate in our minds, or else we use the phrase 'the will of God' in a confusing manner. God *allows* many evil things to happen and uses them, but He does not *intend* them to happen. Similarly a mother *allows* a child to fall on the nursery floor and uses the fall to teach the child to walk better, but she does not *intend* the child to fall or she would push him over. When Jesus met suffering He tried to heal it. When He healed it, He was not acting in opposition to God's will, He was doing God's will. When Jesus saw a woman who was bowed down by physical infirmity, He referred to her in these words: 'This woman whom *Satan* hath bound these eighteen years.'<sup>1</sup> For me that is enough evidence to show that suffering is not the intention of God. We perceive that, in a world constituted as this is, there must be ignorance, folly, and sin. God is always trying to replace ignorance with knowledge, folly with wisdom and sin with holiness. Therefore, the ills that are consequent on ignorance, folly, and sin cannot be His intention. They are His circumstantial will; His will in the circumstances which man's evil throws up.<sup>2</sup> Further, this is a world in which we are so bound up with one another that the ignorance, folly and sins of one bring suffering to many, just as the knowledge, wisdom, and holiness of one bring gain to many. In such a world, built up on the family basis, suffering is bound to come to the innocent as well as the guilty. We both gain and lose by belonging to the human family and we gain more than we lose, for if life were on an individual basis instead of a family basis, most of us would soon cease to live at all.

But having distinguished between what God intends and what God allows we must go on to say that, since He allows suffering, He is ultimately responsible for it and He takes the responsibility for its possibilities because He can use it towards an end which

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> I have worked out this idea in a small booklet called *The Will of God* (Epworth Press), 2s. 6d.



justifies that possibility. It is fire, and fire which He did not kindle, but He has decreed that certain factors like ignorance, folly, and sin whose *possibility* is necessary to human development can produce fire and that fire, having been ignited, can fulfil a function, not utterly destructive, but purifying and cleansing.

In other words, suffering has a *possible* disciplinary value. We must underline there the word 'possible' for the disciplinary value of suffering is not inevitable. Many people who suffer become rebellious, resentful, bitter, cynical, hostile, even atheistic. It depends on the reaction we make to suffering whether it spoils or refines our characters.

It is noteworthy, however, that in everybody's mind there is a relationship between character and suffering. Often it is a false relationship, for people imagine that this particular sin brings that particular suffering, whereas suffering usually falls impartially. They put two and two together and make twenty-two instead of four. But let us note for the moment that there is a relationship.

Here are some actual cases which illustrate the point. When bombs were dropping, a woman in an air-raid shelter said of her husband, who, as an air-raid warden, was exposed to great danger: 'I wish I had made it up with him before he went out into the blitz.' Note that she realizes that her life and her husband's are in danger and she wants to put right a moral relationship because suffering is imminent and death possible. Here is another illustration which every minister has met. As soon as calamity comes, a person will ask: 'What have I done to deserve this?' The answer may quite likely be 'Nothing.' But I am using the illustration to point out that people do link in their minds character and suffering. A person will torture his mind for months trying to find out what particular evil he has done to bring calamity upon him, when the calamity is only his share of the whole world's burden of ignorance, folly, and sin. I had a heart-breaking letter recently from a woman who lost her baby, but who could not get it out of her mind that her child was born with a certain deformity because she had given way to a certain sin. The nature of the deformity and the nature of the sin were such that I am quite

sure that they were not related as effect and cause. But she could not get it out of her mind that they were causally related. She was miserable because her mind was making a false deduction. But here again I am only using the illustration to show the way in which people believe that suffering and character are connected. Every one of my listeners will, I think, agree that, when we have been ill and are recovering, we do take spiritual stock. When pain departs and recovery is in sight we soon cease to ponder our evil nature and wickedness. But, here again, we prove to ourselves the tendency to link character and suffering.

We are emancipated, then, from the false idea that God hands out a cancer to this man because he has been a bad man, and tuberculosis to that woman because she has not said her prayers, but let us at the same time realize that there is a relation—not necessarily causal—between suffering and character, and that, if our reaction is right, God can use the suffering that comes upon us from the ignorance and folly and sin in the world, our own or other people's, and He can use it as fire upon gold. It can bring purification and strengthening and the fact that He does so use it, while often unbearable and intolerable, as we say, is a profound compliment to human nature. The thing that surprises me most in God's ways with men is that He thinks we are beings concerning whom it is worth taking such endless trouble. As Faber wrote:

That Thou should'st think so much of me,  
And be the God Thou art,  
Is darkness to my intellect,  
But sunshine to my heart.

Mr. C. S. Lewis makes much of this last point, and I am indebted to him for what I am about to say. There are probably present a great number of people who are fond of dogs. A trained dog who is a household pet lives longer, is far happier, and is more highly cultured—one might say, is nicer to know—than the wild, untrained animal of the prairie or the pariah dog that haunts an Eastern city. A man who loves his dog washes it when it doesn't

want to be washed. He house-trains it, refusing to allow it to befoul his house. He may whip it to stop it from stealing. It is a matter of great importance to the man that the dog should not be repulsive in its habits. He takes infinite pains with it. Why? Because through discipline there is more than a chance that the man can bring the dog into a communion with himself higher and deeper than would otherwise be possible. If the dog could think and talk to other dogs, no doubt the experiences he underwent at the hands of the man would lead him to confide in other dogs that his master could not possibly love him since he suffered so much. His doggy dignity would often be lowered and his happiness temporarily destroyed. But the sufferings of the dog and the trouble of the man are a compliment to the dog. After all, a man does not go to the same trouble with a rat or a frog. Presumably they are incapable of being brought into such a high communion with man.

Look at the relationship between God and man in a similar way, save that God uses a whip already provided by the effects of man's ignorance, folly, and sin, whereas the man in relation to the dog introduces the whip from outside the situation. But God uses the whip of human suffering for the same purpose—namely, to bring man into communion with Himself.

We may see the thought of the compliment in a different illustration. A child brings his autograph album to a great composer who, to please the child, scribbles a few bars in the book and the child is contented about it. But look at the trouble that composer takes with his great masterpiece, writing, rubbing out, re-writing, introducing this harmony, varying that melody, as Beethoven did with his sonatas. It doesn't require a wild flight to try to imagine that the composition is itself sentient. It might complain and say: 'I wish he would not keep rubbing me out and rewriting. I was all right as I was.' We know that the truth is that the pains the composer takes are a compliment to the composition. It is just because it is a masterpiece that it merits so much more care than the hastily scribbled bars which please the child.

We could find another illustration in the attitude of the great poet to his poem. Those who have seen the original of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* say that he hardly left a line unaltered. He wrote it, and then scratched it out, and then altered the arrangement of the verses, when one might imagine the poem saying, 'My lines rhymed before. Why can't he let me alone?' But to be left alone would mean that the poet was content with something less than the best, less than something that the poem might become.

Herein is illustrated in part our attitude to God.<sup>1</sup> When trouble assails us we cry out to God to say: 'I wish you would leave us alone. All we want is to be happy.' But the trouble the Artist takes to use every kind of discipline that evil brings into life as a means of purifying our character, though intolerable to us at the time, is a tremendous compliment, and, when we cry out to be left alone, we are asking for less care, not more care; for less love, not more love. We are like a dog unwashed, filthy, and with stinking habits, saying, 'I only want to be left alone'. But the God who left us alone as we are now would not be God. Therefore God will use any means, including the suffering He does not will, to shape us and alter us and improve us and win us from our wild, filthy, foul, and unclean habits, so that at last we may be made ready to enter into a communion with Him, the depths of which have never been plumbed.

Let me lighten our thought by recalling a Sunday-school treat to which with great delight I went as a child. We had a benevolent superintendent who only desired that we should all have a happy day. Those who ran in the races and won got a prize, but those who came in last got a surreptitious sweet. At the end of the day 'a good time had been had by all'. But the attitude of the superintendent was kindness rather than love. Love has in it a stern note, something stronger than mere benevolence. Kindness makes us happy, but has no power in it to make us improve. Love has.

Here in the City Temple we have what is called an Adoption

<sup>1</sup> I say 'in part' because in the above illustrations the imperfection is the fault of the composer and poet. In our relationship to God, the fault of imperfection lies with us.

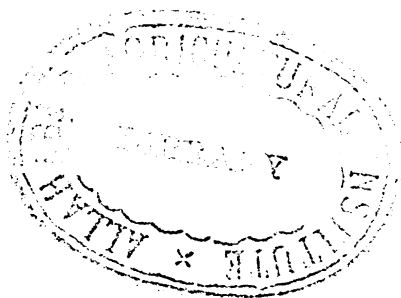
Scheme. Poor and unprivileged families are adopted by individuals or groups of individuals, and Miss Jones from the City Temple goes to visit her adopted family and showers pennies and sweets on the children. She doesn't bother much if they are filthy or foul-mouthed or running at the nose. But their *mother* is much more concerned about these things because she loves them with a love that is greater than mere benevolence and kindness. We cannot imagine a true father saying about his son: 'I don't care if he is filthy and a liar and a knave and a cheat so long as he is happy.' Happiness is not a true end. It is always a by-product. Character is the end, for our character-development contributes to the glory of God which is the end of all human existence.

Now look from these illustrations at God's relationship with us. We ask Him to be kind. There is a true sense in which God is not kind. His relationship with us is bigger and grander and closer. Kindness is often a love-substitute which we offer to people whom we may not love, cannot love, or cannot be bothered to love, and kindness is too poor a thing to express God's relationship to us. We keep on pleading with Him to be kind because we want to be happy. His attitude is higher and deeper. He *loves* us because He wants to bring us into communion with Himself and He knows that we cannot be really deeply and completely happy until we have been brought into communion with Him. Whereas if He is merely kind we shall make happiness our goal and be content with something less than the best, with something less than we may yet become, something less than God can make us, and when we ask God to be kind to us that we may be happy, we are asking for less love, not more; we are being content to remain wild dogs, we are being content to be the rapidly scribbled half-dozen bars of music instead of the masterpiece, we are being content to be the rhyme instead of the poem.

When I think about God I realize that, in weak moments of self-indulgence, I should like to live in a world where 'a good time was had by all', where God was kind and everybody was happy. But in better moments I realize that it would be asking for a love-substitute, kindness. It would be being content with happiness

instead of character. If we could see deeper into the nature of reality, including the things that are unseen, we should realize that the things we want which are not His will ultimately bring only more suffering and misery, however innocent they seem, however badly we want them, however passionately we insist on having them; however accompanied they may be by brilliant planning and however marked they may be by what the world calls success. Our true happiness is a by-product of our quest for blessedness, and blessedness is the complete identity of our will with God's and the fullest realization of our communion with Him.

So now at the end of the sermon let me give you the text in 2 Corinthians iv. 17, 18: 'Our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.' There is possible to us the glory of sons caught up into the Father's fellowship, honoured by the Father's love, brought into communion by His endless patience and the suffering which both He and we endure. This thought can stay us in the hour of our anguish and nerve us in the day of our distress. I only have to look into my own heart to be certain of this, that if God were content with us as we are, it could only mean that He had stopped caring.



## TIME, THE DECEIVER

SOMETIMES when you have been tramping amongst the mountains, you have climbed upward through a long, dark valley that led to the open moors and a wide expanse of sky. At one point in the track, you looked back into the gloom and darkness below you and then turned and looked forward to the brightening sky ahead, and you had a satisfying feeling that, although the steepness and difficulty of the climb were not yet over, at any rate you were getting away from the imprisoning valley out towards open country.

I think we must all feel a little like that to-day. We stand on the threshold of this fateful year 1944 which will probably be the most momentous in the history of the world. We look back along the dark valley through which we have come. At one time it looked very, very dark. It seemed as though our beloved land would be invaded. It even seemed as though that invasion might be successful. But strongly believing in our cause, we plodded on under magnificent leadership, and, by the mercy of God, we stand to-day at a place where we realize that a steep track is still before us, but the imprisoning darkness of the valley of shadows lies beneath our feet.

I think we must say to ourselves, quite definitely, that probably the steepest part of the track lies ahead. Sorrow and suffering stand between us and victory. But the hills are falling back on each side of the path. We can see blue sky at the head of the valley. The open country lies before us and we will go on climbing until we reach peace.

I want to speak this morning especially to those who feel that these war years are stealing something away from them; something that must be written off as permanent loss. For instance, there

are the boys whose careers have apparently been broken. Some had started in business, others had gone to the university; many were preparing to do the one or the other, and then war deflected them to paths they never would have chosen, and they wonder where the path will end and what heart they will have for their chosen life when victory is won. There are the men and women who had just begun married life together, with two or three little ones, perhaps, in the home. And now in these important years, when the development of children's minds, and indeed bodies, needs the care and wisdom of parents, the father, perhaps, is away fighting, and, it may be, the children evacuated to strange homes. There are the lovers, who were proceeding happily to the point when they could marry, who now have been separated. Marriage is indefinitely postponed. In some cases it must frankly be said that the relationship between them has broken down, and in other cases it has been severely strained. How many people there must be who are tired of waiting and who feel that in various ways something is being filched from them by time, by the mere passing of the years!

I don't know any lines in the whole of literature which express this sentiment better than three from a poem by W. B. Yeats:

The years like great black oxen tread the world,  
And God the Herdsman goads them on behind,  
And I am broken by their passing feet.

To those who feel thus I want to bring a message on this New Year's Sunday morning which, quite frankly, it is hard to understand, for the simple reason that it is so difficult for the mind to escape the prison of time. Even in our imaginative thinking it is hard to escape from the tyranny which the concept of time imposes upon us. Time and space are such strange and deceptive entities, and seem to be so much an essential part of the setting of our lives, that to ask you to think in terms of spirit where the words 'time' and 'space' have no real meaning, is to make a very heavy demand on your thought. But I make that demand this morning because for myself, I am convinced that there is a most heartening message



for us which comes at the threshold of this year from our timeless God Himself.

Note in the first place the immense contrast in regard to the tyranny of time between the Old Testament and the New. In the Old Testament we read of men imploring God for long life. It seemed almost the crowning mercy which they craved. Indeed, I have read that, in the Old Testament, the impossible longevity of Methuselah and his contemporaries was based on a different way of reckoning years in order to stress their number. But listen to a few passages:

'Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'<sup>1</sup>

'A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. . . . For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we bring our years to an end as a tale that is told. . . . So teach us to number our days that we may get us an heart of wisdom.'<sup>2</sup>

'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.'<sup>3</sup>

'What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.'<sup>4</sup>

'As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.'<sup>5</sup>

'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.'<sup>6</sup>

These passages are sufficient to show the spirit of the Old Testament in regard to the years. But turn to the New and we find not only that there is no appeal to God for length of life, but that St.

<sup>1</sup> Exodus xx. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm xc. 4-12.

<sup>3</sup> Job xiv. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm xxxiv. 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm ciii. 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm xci. 16.

Paul writes to the Philippians to say that he is quite prepared, if God's purposes demand it, to stay and minister to them, but that he has a greater desire, and that is to end his days on earth and pass into another world. 'Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *for it is very far better.*'<sup>1</sup> And shortly before his death, he says, 'Now I am ready to be offered up [literally, poured out as a drink-offering], and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.'<sup>2</sup>

What an amazing change! And we see at once why. The horizon has lifted. There is none of this clinging to the years and fearing their tyranny. There is no dread, such as the Old Testament saints had, that time was so much the tyrant that they might never see the purposes of God worked out. The horizon lifts and we find that men's feelings could be expressed thus: 'We are ready to spend every day fulfilling Thy purposes, but *we already live in the eternal world* and know that mere time has no power to destroy anything vital.' Now, love is vital, and the purposes of God are vital, and the true life of your own spirit is vital, and on these things mere time has no power at all.

It is very hard to find an illustration, for reasons already given. But here is one that may lighten the message a little. You may live in Finchley. You may live in Streatham. You may live in Hampstead. But all the time you live in London. Your work is in London, not in any suburb. You only use the suburb because it is a convenient way of doing the bigger thing and functioning in London. Now, can I put it like this? You have to live in time. Last year, this year, next year—these are only suburbs. It is convenient to live in them, and indeed, you cannot escape living in them. But your true life is in the central, the vital, the eternal, and all your main purposes are there. A man only puts up with Streatham—I can only think—because it serves the end he fulfils in London. So you may live in to-day and to-morrow, but really you are living in eternity. Your spirit breathes the atmosphere

<sup>1</sup> Philippians i. 23.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy iv. 6-8.

of heaven already and eternal life is not something you enter at death. Timeless eternity is all around you now. In Hampstead you can hear the roar of London, and in the life of the body you know that the spirit life is all around you. With Wordsworth you might say:

Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither  
Can in a moment travel thither . . .  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.<sup>1</sup>

You yourself are not a body functioning in time. You are a spirit functioning in the eternal. You are not a creature of time to whom time can do anything deadly. You are a spirit making use of time, imprisoned for a while in time's limitations, but you belong to the timeless. And if a man moves from a suburb into the real life of the city, you might be disappointed because you could not have physical converse with him, but you would not be saddened beyond the normal sadness of physical separation. And when a man dies he has only gone from the suburbs of time to live always in the eternal city.

It is this timelessness of the New Testament, this wide horizon, that constitutes part of its charm.

There is, however, one passage which appears on the surface to be an exception in the New Testament, and I must be quite honest and not only mention it, but try to explain it. You will find it in St. John ix. 1-4. The disciples say to Jesus, 'Rabbi, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?' Now, Jesus is reported to have said: 'Neither did this man sin nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. We must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.' Now that emphasis on 'the night cometh' sounds like the horizon of the Old Testament back again. But I want to do two things in regard to this passage: first to expound its meaning by a simple device of

<sup>1</sup> *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality.*

repunctuating, and second to suggest that it has no reference to the tyranny of time.

In the old Greek manuscripts there was no punctuation at all. I accept the suggestion made by some scholars that there should be a full-stop after the word 'parents' in the passage I have just quoted, but no full-stop at the end of the third verse, after the word 'him'. By this device the passage reads thus. The disciples have asked, 'Who sinned, this man or his parents that he should be born blind?' Jesus says, 'Neither did this man sin nor his parents. (Put the full-stop there.) But that the works of God should be made manifest in him we must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.' In other words Jesus is saying, 'Don't let us argue why the man is blind. Let us make him better. It wasn't his own fault or that of his parents: but instead of arguing about it, what we have got to get done before nightfall is the work of God in making him better.' In a colloquial phrase, what Jesus says is: 'Don't argue; get on with the cure. In the cure the work of God is made manifest.'

Certainly we cannot accept the idea that the man had been born blind in order that he might be the occasion of a miracle. Jesus dismisses that in a sentence. He then refuses to be involved in an argument as to why the man was blind. Perhaps part of our Lord's humanity meant a real limitation of His own knowledge of such matters. But perhaps He was unwilling to fritter away time in argument when the man might be made to see before sunset, and thus the works of God be made manifest in him.

This then, you see, is not an argument about the tyranny of time. It is an exhortation to make time the servant and not the master. In Kipling's lovely phrase, we have 'to fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run', but not to suppose that time of itself can steal the vital things of life away.

I wonder if I might put this difficult matter to you like this. As I try to understand the New Testament doctrine of time and its significance, I think it is illustrated by the life of a student at the

university. The university life is only a part of his whole life, but only there can he get his degree and his qualification for the wider life that follows his college course. If he is a wise student, he will remember how important it is to get a good degree. If he allows himself to be satisfied with a third-class honours degree, the whole of his future may be altered and he cannot go back afterwards and exchange it for a first-class honours degree. But, if through circumstances outside his control, the university course is abruptly terminated, he is not to worry, for, to press the figure farther than it literally can be pressed, the authority that closes down his course will look after his future. Now, while we exist in the university of time, we are to do our very best to qualify as well as we can, for the earth-life seems to be a college or school, and the way we graduate from it does mean something significant for the life of eternity that follows. But if the earth-life is abruptly closed, the authority that closes it will look after the future.

. . . . .

Part of the trouble we have in receiving this doctrine is that our trust in God is hindered by certain fallacies that we commonly hold about the nature of time. Let me speak of four:

1. Remember that time is like a room in which things happen and has no more influence over the things happening in it than a room has. If your engagement were broken off in a certain room, you would hate the room perhaps, but could not blame it. Do not blame these difficult years as if *of themselves* they could do something to you, for they simply have not the power to do so. Have you noticed how we misuse words? I cannot undo the bolt of an old shed in the garden, and I say, 'It has been corroded by time'. But it hasn't. It has been corroded *in* time, but it has been corroded *by* rust. Or again, we speak of 'the ravages of time'. But there isn't such a thing. Rust can destroy, moths can devour, but time has no such power. We commonly say, 'Time will heal'. But it won't. If the wound is a wound in the body, the healing forces of Nature will do the healing *in* time. But time heals nothing. If the wound be dirty, a limb may be lost by leaving

the healing to time. If the wound be a wound in the mind, it is well to remember that there is a *vis medicatrix naturae* of the mind as well as of the body. But time has never healed a repressed complex or a broken heart. Time has never forgiven our sins, though *in* time we may forget them—a dangerous process, for we shall have to remember them again one day, unless they are forgiven. If the wound be a wound in the soul, you will not find that time will accomplish anything. 'He will improve with time', we say, forgetting that the mere passing of time only turns a young sinner into an old sinner, a young fool into an old fool. If time were a spiritual healer, all old people would be good, whereas many would say with Hood:

But now 'tis little joy  
To know I'm farther off from heaven  
Than when I was a boy.

Before you accuse mere time of doing things to you which you resent, be alert and analytical enough to see what are the real enemies of your well-being.

2. Here is a second fallacy about time. We fall into the fallacy of supposing that time is part of the final structure of reality. In no real sense can this be true for in no real sense is there such a thing as time. Time does not exist at all in the real world of the spirit. Indeed, many people dream of that which is in the so-called future. But, in reality, the past, present, and future are all the same. The dreamers merely bump, in their dreams, into what is *called* the future. Those who find it hard to believe in their freedom of choice since, as they say, 'God knows what I am going to do', would see the difficulty vanish if they remembered two things: (1) What they are going to do, in God's sight, bears the same relationship to Him as what they have done. There is no difference between past and future to Him. They don't say that because He knows the past, He made them do what they did. Why do they say that because He knows their future, His knowledge is coercive? (2) They 'know' that if they offer a bone to a starving

dog he will move towards it. Yet it is not their knowing, but the dog's hunger which is the determinant. It is not God's knowledge that determines our doing. Our doing depends on a hundred factors, all of which He knows but we don't. He sees past, present and future as an eternal present.

Because we mistakenly think of time as part of the final structure of reality we suppose that all hours are equal. From twelve to one seems just as long a period as from one to two. It is, if you measure time by the clock and the sun. But do you really mean that the hour I spent once in a waiting-room while a surgeon operated on the body of one very dear to me was exactly the same length of time as the hour I spent at a Christmas party? And do you mean that from one to four in the middle of the night spent tossing in insomnia is exactly the same length of time as three hours spent at a thrilling film or play? I don't believe it. Indeed, we often say, 'I *feel* as if I had known you for years'. It is a most revealing sentence. It is your unconscious protest against the tyranny and deception of time. And if a person said that to you, you would not take out your watch and say, 'You have known me for one hour and twenty minutes, and so don't you take any liberties'. What you '*feel*' is an indication nearer the truth than the measurement of the watch suggests, for you can '*feel*' in the real world of spirit where, thank God, there are no watches at all and no time either.

And I am not just being aggravating and difficult, for the point has an immense significance. A bereaved woman says: 'It is twenty years since I lost my dear one, and I'm afraid I shall not know him when we meet again.' *But he will know you,*<sup>1</sup> for time has not existed for him. In a sense, time is only a trick. It is only a concession to our limited life on a planet in space. Remember the lovely lines of Laurence Binyon:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mary did not know Jesus on the Resurrection morning, though He had only been dead thirty-six hours, but *He knew her* (John xx. 15, 16).

<sup>2</sup> *Poems for the Fallen.*

Not only has this fallacy a relevance to those we have lost in death, but when you meet your dear one after the long separation of the war, you won't find that time has done anything vital. You may have been unfaithful. He may have been. Physical separation may have done something. But *time* will not have done anything, and you will find the amazing amount that can be done in that little ante-room we call a minute, or an instant.

It is wonderful how the poets can always say things that we, whose medium is prose, find it so difficult to express. Listen to Wordsworth:

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.<sup>1</sup>

And those of you who love Browning may remember the passage in *The Ring and the Book* where the Pope is troubled at what seems the inevitable fate which awaits poor Guido, and then in two lines of lovely insight, the Pope sees hope for Guido because it will only take an instant for him to find salvation:

So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,  
And Guido see one *instant* and be saved.

And I expect that you have often found that one flash of insight in the tiny dwelling of a second has taken you farther than long years of questing. Time, you deceiver, you mocker, you would-be tyrant, I won't be cramped by you! I won't let the black oxen tread me down. I won't be cramped by you for I belong to the eternal things, and though God has put me in this room which I call time, and though I may have to live most of my life in the slums, I know that I belong to the eternal world. And sometimes, when I read grand poetry, or hear wonderful music, or look at the sky, or respond to the love of a dear one, or know the friendship of a little child, I know in that second of insight that I belong to the eternal world. The hills fall back. The valley and its shadows are below me. I escape in the sunshine. 'So teach us to number our days';

<sup>1</sup> *The Tables Turned.*



so teach us to deal with this rank impostor, Time, that we may get our perspective right and be wise to its devices; awake to the cunning thefts it tries to perpetrate. So teach us to number our days that we may get us an heart of wisdom.

. . . . .

3. Look at the third fallacy about time. It would have us believe that long years are an advantage. It would blind us to the horizons of the New Testament and lead us back to the slavery of the Old. Of course, we want our dear ones to be with us in the room of Time because we live in it ourselves. But never let the idea that long years are necessarily an advantage take hold of you. Would you rather be Shelley or Keats dying in youth, but with the delicious feeling that you had done what you came to do, or would you rather have many many mere years and be like the old man I knew who died a week or two ago in the nineties, whom everybody supposed it was a duty to keep alive, and who for the last twenty years has been a nuisance to himself and everybody else? There is something beautiful about length of days when they go with a mellowed, ripe, and lovely spirit whose presence is a benediction. But one of the dearest saints I ever knew was very impatient with those who fussed him and who would not let him do this and would not let him do that. He would say: 'Let me alone. I would rather enjoy myself and die than be miserable and add two more years to my life.' And is not that very sound? Is there *such* a valuable significance then in dying at eighty-six instead of eighty-four? Thomas Osbert Mordaunt says:

One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name.<sup>1</sup>

and an Italian proverb says: 'It is better to be a man for ten minutes than to be a tortoise for a hundred years.' Mr. Mark Thrash, a Tennessee negro, whose estimated longevity was established by Dr. L. P. Jacks, and whose exact age was proved by 'Government investigations', died at 122 years of age, and Siddi

<sup>1</sup> Verses written during the War, 1756-1763.

Wastad of Bhopal is said to have been 163,<sup>1</sup> but who would presume to assess the value of either life in terms of the years? Is not this morbid desire to go on living for the sake of going on living, a way in which we succumb to the tyranny of time?

4. But the last fallacy I want to mention about time could be summarized in a sentence: An obsession with years spoils our perspective. We saw why the Old Testament is so different from the New. Men pleaded with God for years in which they might see His salvation working itself out, and so few of them saw it. There was not time, and they did not really believe in anything beyond time's prison. The old doctrine of Sheol, which they held, meant a shadowy life with uncertain powers and questionable faculties. The old saying that 'whom the gods love die young' was not a cynicism. It simply meant that it was much better to die young because the mind had at least the buoyancy of those who die while still looking ahead, whereas the aged looked at a grey wall called death, towards which they drew nearer, and beyond which there was nothingness. We have now no conception of the dread and terror there was in the lives of the aged, before Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

What an amazing difference there is in the New Testament! They are certain of immortal life. Time is merely a deceiver. Life went on, and it was gain to be without a body and away from earth and uncramped by time. There was no such thing as loss of life. There cannot be loss of life. Life goes on in another room. There is only a passing from one room to another, or perhaps it is more like going out of a stuffy room into the open air of the moors and mountains. 'What is time?' says Browning:

Leave 'Now' for dogs and apes!  
Man has Forever!<sup>2</sup>

How certain Jesus was of that fact! He didn't even labour to prove it, but took it for granted—an immensely significant thing. 'God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob', He said, 'and God

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, January 1, 1944.

<sup>2</sup> *A Grammarian's Funeral*.

is *not the God of the dead but of the living*.<sup>1</sup> Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not passed out into a darkness, but gone on into a light. And when Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration stepped out of the room of Time, He found Moses and Elijah there, and He did not have to get to know them. Time had had no power with them. They had grown 'not old as we that are left grow old'. We cannot emphasize to ourselves too often the timeless nature of the life of the spirit.

It dwells not in innumerable years;  
It is the breath of God in timeless things—  
The strong, divine persistence that inheres  
In love's red pulses and in faith's white wings.

It is the power whereby low lives aspire  
Unto the doing of a selfless deed,  
Unto the slaying of a soft desire  
In service of the high unworldly creed.

It is the treasure that is ours to hold  
Secure, while all things else are turned to dust;  
That priceless and imperishable gold  
Beyond the scathe of robber and of rust.

It is a clarion when the sun is high—  
The touch of greatness in the toil for bread—  
The nameless comfort of the western sky—  
The healing silence where we lay our dead.

And if we feel it not amid our strife,  
In all our toiling and in all our pain—  
This rhythmic pulsing of immortal life—  
Then do we work and suffer here in vain.<sup>2</sup>

Do you remember my telling you about the woman whose son was killed in the Air Force, and who, when people commiserated with her, said such a profound thing that, although I have often pondered it, I have never got to the bottom of it? 'Why do you commiserate with me?' she said. 'He lived for twenty happy,

<sup>1</sup>Matthew xxii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Percy Ainsworth, 'And the Life Everlasting' Wayside Series (Epworth Press).

clean years, and then he died for England. 'What better could he have done than that?' Now if you think that I am the kind of person who could lose my own dear ones and say that kind of thing, I can only say out of sheer honesty that I am not so spiritually advanced as that. I have not got there, but that is where we have all got to get. And all the heroes of the world, in all the spheres of life in which men have been heroic, would, I think, say to us the same thing.

Our time is going! But think of Edward Wilson, whose life is one of the grandest biographies in literature. Supposing you had put your hand on his arm as he was setting off for that glorious adventure to the Antarctic with Scott, and said: 'But my dear Dr. Wilson, you are throwing away your medical training. Besides, it is very cold in the Antarctic and you will get your feet wet.' Oh, let him go! He is only going from a limited suburb to where life is more worth living for a heroic spirit, and if he passes beyond all the rooms we call time, he will have found the great wisdom which is beyond it. 'So teach us to number our days that we may get us an heart of wisdom.'

A friend of mine was once staying in a home in order to preach at a certain church at the week-end. When he was shown into his bedroom, all the curtains were drawn for the evening. The black-out had been done! How nice to come home and find that somebody else has done the black-out! The next morning when the curtains were drawn back, he found that written across the middle of the window-pane, as though with a jewel, were the words: 'This is the day.' When he went downstairs he said to his hostess: 'I was wondering what those words meant written on the window of the room in which I slept.' 'Well', she said, 'once in that room I was passing through very great trouble. Every morning I wished it were evening and every evening I wished the end of life might come with nightfall. And one day I opened my Bible at the Psalms and lighted on this text, "This is the day that the Lord hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm cxviii. 24). And it came to me that time was no tyrant; that time had no hold on me; that it was just something I could fill with the purposes of

God and then pass on gladly to the next room.' Yes, that's the idea. Time cannot steal anything vital; cannot hurt or destroy. It is an opportunity to be used, a room to be lived in, a university from which to graduate; but the spirit of man belongs to another category and his life is in the eternal.

I am no scholar, but I remember in schoolboy days having to translate some odes of Horace. Do you remember the line that contains the famous exhortation, *Carpe diem!*? I think I am right in saying that the best rendering of the Latin tag is, 'Grasp the sleeve of the day'—as though a master of olden days should grab the sleeve of a slave and impress him into his service, to use him for a purpose and then drive him back to the slave's quarters. So let us seize time by the sleeve. It must be servant, never master, and certainly never thief. The words *carpe diem!* seem to have an inner meaning; for conceivably you grab the sleeve of one whose hand is outstretched to steal. Time, you old deceiver, with your bluffing and your pretence, we will use you as we step out into the New Year. For that purpose you were created. But you shall not be master and, what is more, Time, *thou shalt not steal*. No! God is the Master. Time is the slave. And at the end of life's little day, when the last shadows fall apart and the timeless life begins, we shall pass into that dawning loveliness to find that Time has taken nothing vital; that nothing of value has been lost.

We have no hopes if Thou art close beside us,  
And no profane despairs;  
Since all we need is Thy dear hand to guide us,  
Thy heart to take our cares;  
For us is no to-day, to-night, to-morrow,  
No past time nor to be,  
We have no joy but Thee, there is no sorrow,  
No life to live but Thee.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Poems* (Eyre & Spottiswoode).

## THE DAY OF THE LORD

I WANT to try to get over to you a message which is not easy for us to receive in these days. It was easier in olden days for a reason which will appear. But it is a message of comfort and strength, because it fills history, national, international, and even the personal history of our own lives, with meaning and significance. Its strengthening is still available for us, for it is true, although I think it must be offered and received in a manner different from that of olden times.

In Old Testament days, men of God found strength and comfort in the thought that God was enthroned above the life of earth and would act from above in supernatural ways to fulfil His own purposes. These were days when it was easy to believe in the supernatural. In those days men did not worship science, nor shut their minds against anything they could not understand.

Further, these were days when men of God put God in the centre of all their thoughts. They did this to an extent which to us is unreal. For instance, if, in battle, a victory were won, it was because God fought on their side. The victory was due, not to superior armaments or more brilliant tactics, to greater numbers or a clever ruse. Victory was the act of God. If they were fighting uphill and the sunset lingered, they sought no natural explanation. God had made the sun stand still for His own people.<sup>1</sup> If they lost a battle, it was not that they were outflanked by the enemy, or that they were poor fighters, or that they were outnumbered. It was God who was visiting upon them His displeasure. All was of God.

Again and again, their national life seemed to show little sign of the touch upon it of a divine hand, but by stressing the future tense and talking about a Day of the Lord, these great souls from

<sup>1</sup> Joshua x. 13.

Abraham to Amos hung on to their faith in God and were strengthened thereby. All the prophets, without exception, spoke of a Day of the Lord in the future, when God would deliver His people, overcome evil, reign in obvious justice and bring joy to the hearts of His own. 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.'<sup>1</sup> That is only one of an almost countless number of prophecies pointing to a 'Day of the Lord', when wrong would be righted and the nature and power of God vindicated.

We must not merely dismiss this as 'wishful thinking'. When we are thinking about God, we cannot, if we think truly, wish better than the truth. The trouble is that we poor mortals have such little power of true thought and true judgement that what we deem would be much better for us, would often work out in our undoing. Nothing can be better than the truth about God. Where He is concerned nothing is 'too good to be true', though a lot of things we want and think would be for our good are not good enough to be true. Yet we are plunged into despair when we fail to get them! No! it was not merely wishful thinking, this thought of the Day of the Lord. It was a determined, tenacious hold, by faith, on God and on the proud, unconquerable belief that God would win and that the values man counts precious are indeed invincible. Though that future tense may have strained faith, the Old Testament saints held on by means of it. 'The "Day of the Lord" will come', they argued. Evil is but for a moment. Righteousness *will* triumph. Evil *will* be swept away. God's reign *will* be established.

Now let us turn to the New Testament days. We find most interestingly that again, a hope, which is expressed by means of the future tense, is the stay of the early Christians. After the Ascension of Christ, the whole Christian Church believed that in a very short time Christ would return again. The Pauline writings are full of the promise that Christ would come and reign, and that the vindication of His nature and purposes would be seen by His people. 'Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xxxv. 1.

Jesus Christ is Lord.'<sup>1</sup> 'Then cometh the end when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power, for He must reign until He hath put all His enemies under His feet.'<sup>2</sup> The Day of the Lord was *coming*. Sometimes this return of Christ was thought of as separate from the end of the world, but sometimes it was identified with it. Indeed, the imminence of Christ's return became a dominating idea and one which tended to disintegrate Christian society. St. Paul seems to have written his first letter to the Thessalonians (the earliest of all the New Testament books and written before any of the Gospels) with the dominant thought in his own mind of Christ's speedy return. In his second epistle he directs them to the 'patient waiting for Christ', for the simple reason that many early Christians had thrown up their jobs and shown other disturbing signs of unrest and disquietude, because they no doubt argued, 'What is the good of going on working, or indeed of engaging in any serious secular activity when our Lord will return at any moment and catch us up into another life?' No wonder they felt like that when they read the words in 1 Thessalonians iv. 16-18:

'For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

'Then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

'Wherefore comfort one another with these words.'

Here, then, we see a similar source of comfort and strength, though again the future tense must have strained their patience and courage. They held on to the thought that Christ *would* return, everything *would* be put right. Nero would not have the last word. Christ *would* visibly reign, His enemies be vanquished, His own followers vindicated.

What has all this to do with us? Has this message of a future 'Day of the Lord', so strongly believed by Old Testament saints,

<sup>1</sup> Philippians ii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians xv. 24-5.



so tenaciously held in the early Church, no message for us at all? I think it has. I am not now going to discuss the second coming of Christ, save to say that it is very hard for the mind to hold two contradictory ideas together and find comfort in both. I mean that if one is continually thinking of Christ as 'coming', one weakens the thought that He is 'here'; our ever-present Friend, with us and strengthening us day by day. Further, the many promises Christ Himself made about His coming, to the effect that His own generation would not pass away before certain things were fulfilled and that those standing around Him would see them,<sup>1</sup> were, to my mind, all fulfilled at Pentecost. I feel, therefore, that Pentecost for the disciples did not mean the coming of the third Person of the Trinity—a conception utterly strange to them at that time—so much as the return of their beloved Lord. He had promised not to leave them comfortless, but to come to them, and on Whit-Sunday they felt just as they used to do when He was visibly in their midst, as indeed He was in the Spirit.

But, reverting to the thought of God's action from above, His intervention in history, which supported the saints of both Old Testament and New Testament days, how can we receive this support, especially if we let go the thought of a visible second coming?

We too may think of a world climax to history. We too must use the future tense concerning it and it does not much matter whether we regard that climax of history as the Day of the Lord, or the second coming of Christ, or the end of the world. Faith in God involves *a certainty that God will bring His purposes to their perfect fulfilment*. He will indeed judge the nations. Evil will be certainly overthrown. God will triumph. The eternal values will be vindicated. God will be seen to be King. History will have a worthy climax.

But when this has been said, a difficulty arises for the modern man which did not arise for the early Christians or the Israelites of old. The difficulty really lies in the fact that the modern man can-

<sup>1</sup> See Mark xiii. 26; Matthew x. 23, xxvi. 64; Mark xiv. 62; Matthew xvi. 27; Mark viii. 38, ix. 1; Luke ix. 26-7.

not look forward to an event which will be a climax of history. It is part of his difficulty in regard to time. Just as it is impossible to imagine time starting, so it is impossible to imagine time stopping, and equally impossible to imagine time going on for ever. We cannot imagine an event or climax marking the fulfilment of God's purposes and containing such finality that no other event could follow, or need follow upon it, because no other event could have any relevance, significance, or meaning. To use Professor Dodd's figure, the end 'is such that nothing more could happen in history because the eternal meaning which gave reality to history is now exhausted. To conceive any further event on the plane of history would be like drawing a cheque on a closed account.'<sup>1</sup> We cannot conceive a moment happening in time which could mark at once the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection.

Shall we moderns, then, throw over the idea of a Day of the Lord because we cannot conceive it? Unable to conceive a time when time ends, or a condition on earth when all God's earth-bound purposes are complete, are we to throw over those great dominating ideas of a Day of the Lord which so strengthened the faith of men and women in both Old Testament and New Testament times?

We need not and must not. Let us, then, try to see how we, as moderns, can appropriate to ourselves the strength of the idea of the Day of the Lord. To do this, I want to take an illustration from the Cross. The Cross happened in the past, but we regard it as a symbol of something that is eternally true. That truth has power for the present and the future. While the Cross means many other things, it stands as a symbol of the victory of love, of the nature of God and of His reaction against sin. It happened in the past, but it has value now. It is Christ's pledge, given in Time, that He will never leave us.

The idea of the Day of the Lord is an idea which has reference to an unimaginable future. But just as the Cross, though

<sup>1</sup> Professor C. H. Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching* (Hodder & Stoughton), p. 206; cf. Dr. J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (Cam. Univ. Press), p. 181.

historically *past*, symbolizes a truth which has power for the *present*, so the Day of the Lord, though historically in the *future*, is also symbolic. It symbolizes a truth which has power for the *present*, and just as we speak of 'the Cross', meaning a symbol of the love of God for us now, so when we speak of 'the Day of the Lord', the very idea of such a Day is itself a symbol of the enthroned God, the Moulder of all history, the triumphant Victor over all that happens in the time process, and the omnipotent Power who makes all things work out His will, who lives, and would have us live, now partially, but finally fully, in a phase of existence, supernatural and supra-historical, when all that we call time is caught up into Eternity.

This, of course, does not mean any glib thought that 'everything will work out all right in the end'. From God's point of view, it will, but sin will always temporarily hinder His kingdom and indubitably break the person who continues in it without repentance.

I know that the thought of the Day of the Lord as a symbol is difficult, partly because it is so hard for the human mind to escape the imprisonment of the sense of time. If you have seen any of the plays, *Berkeley Square*, or *Time and the Conways*, or *We Have Been Here Before*, if you have read Mr. Priestley's musings about time in *Midnight on the Desert*, or studied J. W. Dunne's book, *An Experiment with Time*, these difficulties will be apparent to you. But when I say that the idea of the Day of the Lord points, not only to a future date, but to a present reality, I mean that when one is talking about eternal things, it is as true to say, 'it is happening', or indeed 'it has happened', as to say, 'it will happen'. Time is a concession to human thought. It has no eternal reality. So we hear Jesus even before His Passion saying: 'Now is the Prince of this world cast out.' Now! And telling the disciples, 'I have overcome the world', just *before* that deed of shame when the world thought evil had overcome Him. This is what theologians mean when they say that every man must have his teleology, his philosophy of completion, and that eschatology, the doctrine of the fulfilment of God's purposes and the end of the world, is that teleology.

The truth is that the whole time-bound world finds its meaning and significance in a timeless world, the eternal heaven that wraps it round. And in Jesus Christ and all He means, that eternal reality has broken into time and we are assured of the victory of God and the meaningfulness of life. That meaningfulness runs, not only through great events of history, but through the humblest life of man. It is as though someone picked up all the beads of life that seem scattered, unrelated and meaningless incidents, and threaded them into a necklace. All lives are purposeful because they are part of the eternal world, and the day of the Lord, though future, as far as history is concerned, is an eternal reality, a present experience, as well as a future consummation of the victory of God. Though we must still work for it, pray for it, and indeed fight for it, in the eternal world the victory of God has happened already, and the proof of that happening is the life, words, acts, death, and Resurrection of Christ. God's own purpose and grace were given to us in 'Christ Jesus', as Paul said to Timothy, '*before times eternal*, but hath *now* been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel'.<sup>1</sup>

Modern as we are, therefore, we must try to receive this thought that lay behind the faith both of the Old and of the New Testament. Life can never pass out of God's controlling hands. The universe cannot run amok. His purposes can never fail completion. In an eternal world they are complete now. No one can possibly suffer for the truth in vain. All values are vindicated already and will be seen by all to be vindicated. The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. And He reigns through suffering, said St. John, 'All that dwell on the earth shall worship Him . . . the Lamb that hath been slain *from the foundation of the world*'.<sup>2</sup> Eternal life is here and now. It is future, yes, but present also and is to be estimated in quality and depth rather than duration and future experience. If we could see all the world's history lying in the eternal, we should find rest for our own minds and support for our own faith. Alas! our vision is clouded. In the days of His flesh men saw in Jesus not the

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy i. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation xiii. 8.

second Person of the Trinity, pre-existent and for ever enthroned, reaching from the past, through the present to the future. They saw a Man going about doing good, but they knew they had seen the nature of the Eternal. 'We see not yet all things subjected to Him. But we see . . . Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour.'<sup>1</sup> The Day of the Lord is not only to be thought of in time. Like Christ Himself, it is also a symbol of the eternal victory of love, the full circle of His eternal purposes, the realization of man's highest dreams, the clue to the meaning of history on this humble planet, the consummation of the plans of a Holy, Loving God, who has ever reigned, is reigning, and must reign, world without end.

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews ii. 8-9.

## RESTING IN GOD'S INFINITY

THE aim of the sermon, as of the whole service, is to help us to realize a little more truly how great God is and, therefore, how adequate He is for any situation that can arise in our own lives or in the world. As we do this we can rest our minds and hearts in His infinity.

It has been very hard to choose a text because there are so many. Let me give you some of them.

*Isaiah lv. 9:* 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'

*Psalms xl. 16:* 'Let all those that seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee: let such as love Thy salvation say continually, the Lord be magnified. But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me.'

*Psalms xxxiv. 3:* 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.'

I should like to add to those passages others from poets who did not live in time to have their words included in the Bible. I hope it will not hurt anybody's feelings if I say that the inspiration of the Bible is not essentially different in kind from the inspiration of religious poets and prophets of later periods. Do you know this passage from Sidney Lanier's great poem called 'The Marshes of Glynn'?<sup>1</sup>

As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,  
Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God:  
I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies  
In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh and the skies:  
By so many roots as the marsh-grass sends in the sod  
I will heartily lay me a-hold on the greatness of God:  
Oh, like to the greatness of God is the greatness within  
The range of the marshes, the liberal marshes of Glynn.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Scribner's Sons.

And, finally, two lines from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem, 'The Rhyme of the Duchess May'.

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our  
incompleteness—  
Round our restlessness, His rest.

So much for texts!

. . . . .

1. I wonder if you have ever noticed that no Biblical poet or prophet ever sets the thought of God's greatness over against the thought of man's littleness, in order to make man feel insignificant and of no consequence. On the contrary, all the great Biblical writers set the thought of God's greatness over against the need of man. They magnify God not to make man feel small, but to make man feel that the resources of this mighty Being are at his disposal. We are not to argue, 'If He is so great, I must be of no account at all', but rather 'How great He is and, therefore, how able to take care of me and look after my interests'.

I should be interested if any worshipper can find a passage which denies this. Even in that magnificent passage in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, where the prophet is rejoicing in the might of God, I claim that this point is not denied. We read of God that 'He comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance'; that the 'nations to Him are as a drop in a bucket', and 'the small dust of the balance'; and that 'He taketh up the isles as a very little thing'. But the passage is introduced by the verse, 'He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, He shall gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom'. And the mighty passage ends with the words: 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.' In other words, this mighty God, whom it is absurd for the maker of idols to try to imprison in a piece of wood or metal, is One whose vast energies are at the disposal of those who trust in Him.

Or take that other passage in the Psalms' (viii. 3) which might seem to dispute my claim. The Psalmist says, 'When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?' But don't stop there! For the poet goes on to say: 'Thou hast made him but little lower than God' (in the original we have the word *God—elohim*—not angels), 'Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou hast put all things under his feet.' In other words, the poet is rejoicing in the glory of God in order that he may rest the minds of men in God's infinity.

In another psalm we have a similar adjacency of ideas in a passage we considered some months ago. 'He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; He giveth them all their names' (Psalm cxlvii. 3-4).

The Psalmists never seem to think of the greatness of God without revelling in the thought of what that means in terms of man's comfort and strengthening.

In Psalm xxxiv—the text already given—the Psalmist cries out, 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together', and immediately goes on to say: 'I sought the Lord and He answered me. . . . They looked unto Him, and were lightened.' And then, most marvellous of all, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles'. And remember that when the Psalmist cries out, as he so often does, 'O magnify the Lord', he does not mean, 'Let us tell God what a wonderful person He is, and let us in our insignificance crawl at His feet'. He means, 'Let us realize how big God is and how adequate for all our needs, and let us rest our minds and hearts, our worries, our concern for our loved ones, our whole nation's troubles, on His breast'.

Behold, I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.

I am rather jealous for religion in this matter because so often it seems as though the scientist, the poet, the musician, and the



dramatist point to a bigger God than ours. I would commend to you the reading of Samuel Foss's great poem, 'The Greater God'. Let me quote two verses only:

As wider skies broke on his view,  
God greatened in His growing mind;  
Each year he dreamed his God anew,  
And left his older God behind.

He saw the boundless scheme dilate,  
In star and blossom, sky and clod;  
And, as the universe grew great,  
He dreamed for it a greater God.

It is that greater God that so many of us need. And the scientists, whom some may think of as undermining our faith in God, is really a servant of God pointing to the vastness of the Creator.

I am not going to spend any time this morning bringing to you scientific facts and quoting astronomical figures about the vast distance between one star and another, or the insignificance of this planet compared with the size and weight of others. (As Pascal said: '*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.*') But you remember how Kepler, the astronomer, cried out after much study of the heavens, 'O God, I am thinking Thy thoughts after Thee'. And if the Milky Way is one of His ideas, what kind of a God is this? And how, in the light of such a thought, we can hear the intensity of the Master's voice crying, 'O men, how little you trust Him!' (Matthew vi. 30, Moffatt's translation). Jeans and Eddington and Whitehead have all taught us to have a greater God. Towards the end of Jean's book, *The Mysterious Universe*, we find this: 'The stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality: the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine.' Popular astronomy is teaching us all to 'think God's thoughts after Him'.

Then, think how the poet laments the littleness of religion. Like the scientist, his own God seems bigger than ours. I cannot avoid the feeling that that was in Wordsworth's mind when so passionately he cried:

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! . . .  
. . . Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Surely he means that we have whittled down our religion,—a religion that should lift us to tuneful harmony with the whole universe,—until it has become a triviality.

Or, if you love music and have listened to Bach's 'Toccatà and Fugue in D minor' or Liszt's 'Hungarian Rhapsody'—both of them, you remember, opening in the same way with a series of majestic phrases—I imagine that your heart has been singing, 'How great is God for He is the source of all beauty!'

The dramatist, too, gives one the same feeling. Do you remember near the end of Bernard Shaw's *St. Joan* how Joan lifts up her arms to heaven and cries, 'When will the earth be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?' For myself I wish Shaw had finished the play at that point. To me, everything else is anticlimax. But did you not get, in that play, the sense of the long, slow processes of life, moving out in the hands of a patient God to an end which no man could deny, working through pain and suffering and frustration to some majestic climax beyond all the dreams of man?

And then put over against all that—the revelation of God which the scientist, the poet, the musician and the dramatist make—put over against that, I say, the conception of religion which you get from so many religious people. It seems trivial, fussy, petty, little-minded, gossipy. Mind! I know the actors quarrel amongst themselves, and musicians are said to be temperamental, and poets can be odd folk at times, but they keep their pettiness out of their art. Our trouble is that as Christian people we have to practise our art all the time. That is the difficulty. But, men and women, do let us try to show people a religion that is vast and big. Religion is in the same set of ideas as the boundless sea and mighty mountains and age-long purposes and tremendous courage and

adventurous faith and broad tolerance and endless goodwill. And if there is any one here who is on the verge of the Christian community, I would ask him to pay no attention to the religion of Mrs. Jones, who has stayed away from church for three Sundays because she was not invited to take an urn at a tea-meeting, and who, by her absence, is paying out her fellow Christians and showing God what she thinks of Him. Pay no attention to Mr. Smith, who has lost his faith in God because the parson didn't hear of his earache in time to visit him before it was better. No! That is nothing to do with religion at all, and neither, I think, are denominational intolerances or pettifogging committee meetings where, as some wit has said, 'minutes are kept, but hours are wasted'; or where, as a friend of mine once said, 'a group of people, composed of those who individually do not intend to do anything, meet together to decide that nothing shall be done'. Let us *magnify* the Lord together! Let us have a *great* God, not one who appears to be a kind of large-size, elderly gentleman in a black frock-coat, who is almost wholly absorbed in our little denominational chapel. No scientist, no poet, no musician, no dramatist, no artist ought to be able to point to a God greater than the Father of Jesus Christ whom we Christians worship. For all science and all poetry and all music and all drama are but revelations of His nature and His ways with men. These are but the fringes of His ways. Our God, vast and infinite, stands behind them all, greater than man's power to imagine, better than man's loveliest thoughts.

So can you, in your pew this morning, relax your body and hush your mind and quieten your heart, and rest in the infinity of God. You have heard of the prayer of the Breton fishermen: 'O God, help me. My boat is so small. Thy sea is so large.' But on that sea the boat can rest, and a million others too, and on the breast of God can rest every troubled spirit in His world.

2. Look, if you will, at three things that happen if we have a God who is too small,

(i) First of all, He is too small for our lives. We have sung the verse that puts this in a nutshell:

O Lord, how happy should we be  
If we could cast our care on Thee,  
If we from self could rest,  
And feel at heart that One above,  
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,  
Is working for the best!

There you have the same idea of resting on His infinity. You see, if you have a little God, you almost get into the mood of one who says to Him: 'I'm afraid you can't do anything to help me.' Whereupon, as my teacher and friend, Dr. Maltby, would have said, God may turn on you and say: 'Oh! I dealt with a much harder case than yours yesterday.' If there is a God at all, He is big enough to be trusted, and big enough for all our problems and all our needs and all our troubles. 'O magnify the Lord with me . . .'

Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our  
incompleteness—

Round our restlessness, His rest.

(ii) And if we have a little God the second thing that happens is that He is too small for our prayers. And here I would say a word hoping that you will not misunderstand. It is right for us to imagine God as our Father. Jesus taught us to do this. He built up His parables on this theme. The least erroneous way of thinking of God at all is to think of Him as a perfect Father. But I do want very definitely to say this. We are to think of God as a Father as to His character. We are not to think of Him as a Father as to His power, or the immense scope of His plans, or the strange way those plans *appear* to have of going wrong or looking heartless and cruel. God is a Father in that He will never do anything that is unfatherly, whatever appearances may be. But I am sure our conception of God must go beyond the picture of a good human father. Even in terms of character it is often hard to make the word fit, as we shall see.

For example, people have said to me: 'I can't understand how God can listen to my prayers if thousands of other people in other places are praying to Him at the same moment.' But do you see three snags in such a remark? The questioner is imprisoning God in space and in time and in regard to numbers. I know we are all thus imprisoned. We cannot break out of such a prison. We do not know, therefore, what it is like outside the prison of space and time and calculation. But God does not live in that prison. For instance, if people are in Australia, it doesn't make any difference to God, and if ten thousand are calling to Him at the same time; try to remember that time does not exist for Him. And if a million are praying to Him at the same second, we can only solve the problem by telling ourselves—what we cannot hope entirely to comprehend—that a numerical system is only a concession to human thinking. If this were not true, God would be like 'the old woman who lived in a shoe, and had so many children she didn't know what to do'. To use a very long word, we are too anthropomorphic. That is Greek! In English it means that we make God in our own image and think of Him in terms of an enlarged human mind. We've overdone the idea of thinking of Him as a Father. We've made Him only a bit bigger than ourselves. But even we ourselves realize that the greater the human mind the less bewildering are numbers. To an *infinite* mind, numbers are not merely less bewildering, but a non-existent factor in the working out of the purpose. God does not find it 'harder' to guide two lives than one. We might express that simply by saying that numbers do not exist to God in the sense in which they exist for us and imprison us. Or, to put it in yet another way; when you pray, God gives Himself in loving attention to you *as if you were the only person in the universe*. The difficulty of the questioner, whom I have quoted, is that his God is too small. He would find rest for his mind in God's infinity.

I hope that does not sound too abstruse, for actually it has a very practical significance. When you pray for Private Jones who is fighting in Germany, don't imagine that God thinks of him as General Montgomery does. The general, however good, is bound

to argue: 'Well, I must not mind losing several hundred men if I can win this battle and achieve this end.' Being human, he cannot possibly give undivided attention to Private Jones. But God is not like that. God's love and care and interest surround Private Jones as if he were the only person in the universe, for God is not limited by our prison of time or space or numbers. Said Augustine: 'He loves us every one as though there were but one of us to love.' And if Private Jones is killed, so far from being 'lost', as we say, he lives in another and better room in God's house, and when his little daughter, home in England, is sobbing into her pillow because her Daddy is killed, the infinite comfort and love of God are round her life as if hers were the only broken heart in God's care. And if Private Jones's wife says she won't believe in God any more because her man is killed, God doesn't desert her or fail to act purposefully in and through her. Indeed, her power to reject Him is itself the power of God, and an infinite God is working our purposes which no mere incident like death can do more than divert into another channel. Let us stop thinking of God as though He were only a very great Man, even a good Man, for, as He says, through His inspired prophet, 'My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts'. His power is far greater than anything we associate with the word 'father'.

(iii) Thirdly, if we have too small a God we shall find that He is too small for our problems. If you think of God only as a Father, you are picking up a key that will not unlock all the doors because it is so hard to stretch the idea of 'fatherhood' to cover all the things which God allows and does. God is good always, to everybody, and for ever, but the word 'fatherly' makes difficulties.

Let me illustrate in three ways:

(a) God appears to allow vast issues to hang on what we call details. A human father doesn't. He doesn't make a university career depend on whether a boy chooses an egg for breakfast or not. Some vast issues in God's plans appear to depend on details. 'Had Cleopatra's nose been shorter', said Pascal, 'the whole course of the world would have been altered.' Do you not imaginatively

tremble when you read the story of Mary and Joseph travelling towards Bethlehem? Here is Mary, expecting her Child in an hour or two, and riding on a donkey in the dark. Have you ever thought what would have happened if that donkey had stumbled and thrown that rider off? Have you ever thought about your own life and wondered, as you noted what immense things appear to hang on some trivial detail? I could give you illustrations from the lives of men and women in which the greatest happenings have appeared to hang on the most trifling events. Truly, big doors swing on small hinges, and sometimes God seems to take tremendous risks, and chance seems to play such a part.

Here is a paragraph from my friend Isaac Foot's recent booklet on Cromwell and Lincoln.<sup>1</sup> 'If Cromwell or Lincoln had been born ten years earlier, or ten years later, the likelihood is we should never have heard of either of them. Some would say it was the mere chance of history that when the Civil War, with all its immense consequences to England and the world, broke out in 1642, Oliver Cromwell was there, aged forty-three, in the plentitude of his capacity, and that when Stephen Douglas, in 1854, proposed the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, Abraham Lincoln was there, at the age of forty-five, at the precise moment when he was best fitted to challenge Douglas and all the implications of his policy. These circumstances, *which we might dismiss as mere chance*, were, in fact, accepted by both men as *the mark of a high vocation*, and, rightly or wrongly, they regarded themselves as instruments prepared and fitted to meet the challenge which they could only ignore at the peril of their souls'.<sup>1</sup>

But, you see, when we are talking like this we are using words that have no meaning to God. With Him *there is no such thing as a detail*. He made a fly's leg as carefully as He made a star. The first wasn't a 'detail' and the second 'important'. And with Him there is no such thing as chance, for the word, even to us, simply covers those happenings which are the product of laws we do not fully understand. If you knew all the laws that operate when you

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Foot, *Oliver Cromwell and Abraham Lincoln* (Royal Society of Literature).

throw up a penny, you would *know* whether it would come down 'heads' or 'tails'. To an infinite God there is no such thing as chance, for nothing is unknown. Indeed, since there is no such thing as time, there is nothing still to happen which can surprise God, for the future and the past stand in the same relationship to God. Both are eternally present. This is hard for us. It raises immense difficulties including the old bogey that if God knows the future, man is not free. Yet when we say God knows the past we don't feel that His knowing determined it. Why do we think His knowing the future determines it? The past and future stand in the same relationship to Him. Our only mental rest is in the infinity of God, with whom is no detail, no chance, no unimportant event, no past, no present, no future. All exists in His life which being infinite is beyond our comprehension.

(b) If you had the power and you struck a person with lightning, drowned thousands by flood, smote hundreds of thousands by earthquake, you would be locked up in prison, and rightly. As we look at things we declare that a good father would not allow such a thing to happen if he could prevent it. God, at any rate, *allows* it, and He remains our Father all the time, but I find help by remembering that while faith must claim for Him Fatherhood it must claim for Him the Infinite Purpose acting beyond anything we humans can call 'fatherly'. And while we endlessly discuss the problem of pain and suffering, and while there is much light that faith and understanding can throw on such a problem, there is a hard core of impenetrable mystery. I feel it, as you do, when I see a little child suffer. Surely you must see that we need a far bigger conception of God than that He is like a father. We want all that the word 'father' can be made to cover but much more as well.

(c) Then, look how unjust life is to many people. A human father tries to be just as he deals with his children. If I took you to Leeds, I could introduce you to two young women. One lived in a happy home, went to a very good school, has always had splendid health, left school and went to Switzerland to 'finish', married a nice man, has got three lovely children, still lives in a



comfortable house, has not suffered through the war, and apparently hasn't a care in the world. But in the same city I could take you to another girl of the same age who lives in a slum. She had an operation and the surgeon made a mistake. For years she has been in pain and lies in bed in a slum room, from which she can see nothing that God made except a strip of sky. Even that is usually smoke-laden. Further, she isn't a nice pulpit illustration of a person who is always cheerful and bright, and into whose room it is a benediction to go. On the contrary, she swears, curses God, and spends hours in bitter, resentful weeping. But what is God doing to allow such injustice? A human father would put it right if he had the power. And how can that ever be put right? Will the first girl suffer in the next world that the second's troubles may, in some sense, be levelled up? That doesn't make sense and the second girl doesn't desire it. Can the sufferer have any recompense in another world to make her feel that no injustice has been done? I don't see how. Frankly, I don't know the answer. I don't pretend to know it, and all over the world questions are going up to God from sincere hearts, as well as from bitter, distorted minds—Why? Why? Why? And there isn't an answer except that we can rest our minds in the thought of God's infinity. If God is at all, He is infinite. If He is God at all, He is good. For it is incredible that His creatures should be greater than He. Infinite goodness, then, is round about us. And we can only find peace in the realization that He must be far greater than our thoughts about Him and better than we have the power to conceive. The unquenchable, unsilenceable demand for justice by which we arraign the seeming injustice of God is God's own gift. He planted in our hearts the standards by which we judge Him. 'I'm not prepared', says a character in a novel by Somerset Maugham,<sup>1</sup> 'to be made a fool of. If life won't fulfil the demands I make on it, then I have no more use for it. It's a dull and stupid play and it's only a waste of time to sit it out. I want life to be fair. I want life to be brave and honest. I want

<sup>1</sup> *The Narrow Corner*, pp. 272 ff. Quoted from *The Human Situation*, Gifford Lectures, 1935-7, by W. Macneile Dixon, p. 230 (Arnold).

men to be decent and things to come right in the end. That's not asking too much is it? Resignation? That's the refuge of the beaten. Keep your resignation. I don't want it. I'm not willing to accept evil and injustice and ugliness. I'm not willing to stand by while the good are punished and the wicked go scot free. If life means that virtue is trampled on and honesty mocked and beauty fouled, then to hell with life! Exactly, but what does the last phrase mean? Life has to be *lived*, even though you say, 'to hell with it', and since no explanation is forthcoming which is big enough to fit all the facts, the wise alternative is a faith that rests on His infinite love and infinite purposefulness.

. . . . .

Let us comfort ourselves by realizing that there are three certainties.

(1) We know our values are right—justice, truth, goodness, beauty, kindness, and so on. All who have known God best, assert and exemplify this.

(2) We know that our blessedness is His goal, and that, in spite of all appearances, He is in charge of the universe, careful of every life, and that we are all within a mighty plan, greater than our conceiving, but the end of which is certainly our highest well-being.

(3) We know that our Master, Christ, is a sufficient clue to the nature of God and that in Him we can know God as a Friend.

Do you realize, men and women, that when you *know* a person you are content to wait for an explanation of the things he does and allows? 'He who hath heard the Word of God', said Ignatius, 'can bear His silences.'

Some years ago I used an illustration of a little boy whose father was a surgeon. We imagined somebody going to that boy and saying: 'Do you know that your father gets people on a table, and when they are unconscious and cannot defend themselves, he cuts their bodies with a sharp knife and sometimes takes parts of them away? How would you like to have that done to you?' The child could not argue, but if he could, he would rest his

mind in the greatness of his father, *and in his knowledge of his father reached by another route.* 'I know my Daddy,' we could imagine the child saying, 'and I have to leave what you say until I can fit the puzzle together.'

We cannot comprehend the infinity of God. God will always be beyond the compass of our little, finite minds, and He will both do and allow things that puzzle, bewilder, and affright us, but, although we don't know much *about* God, we know God in Jesus, and knowing, we can rest our minds in His infinity.

So, in the maddening maze of things,  
When tossed by storm and flood,  
To one fixed ground my spirit clings,  
I know that God is good.

I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our  
incompleteness—  
Round our restlessness, His rest.

'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together', for He is greater than all human thought concerning Him and better than all men's dreams.

## A MESSAGE TO THE SPIRITUALLY DISCOURAGED

I HAVE chosen a number of texts because I want us to see how repeatedly St. Paul offered this message to the Christians to whom he wrote:

*2 Corinthians v. 17:* 'If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation' (R.V. margin).

*Romans xiii. 14:* 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.'

*Galatians iii. 27:* 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ.'

*Ephesians iv. 24:* 'Put on the new man.'

*Colossians iii. 9-10:* 'Ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man.'

*Romans vi. 11:* 'Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.'

*Colossians iii. 3:* 'Ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God.'

To all these words of St. Paul I should like to add the words of Christ in the parable of the Prodigal Son:

*Luke xv. 22:* 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him.'

Very few of us really know ourselves and not one of us knows himself completely. No man has ever seen his own eyes, but only their reflection, since he uses his eyes with which to see. Similarly, no man has seen his own spiritual nature, but only its reflection in his reactions to circumstances. Have you never looked in a mirror and said, 'Good Heavens! do I look like that?' Have you never looked back on the way you behaved in certain circumstances, on the way you reacted to certain happenings and said with even deeper dismay, 'Good Heavens, am I really that kind of person?'

Even that part of our nature at which we *can* look, we see only through coloured spectacles. When we try to look at our inner selves we look at them through spectacles coloured by complexes,

prejudices, temperamental distortions, influences that affected our childhood, heredity, environment, and so on.

Some people look at themselves through rose-coloured spectacles. A man sees himself as 'a fairly decent chap', or as a successful business man, or as a popular speaker; a woman may see herself as a social success, or a good wife or mother, or, perhaps, as a beautiful singer. Even those who see themselves in such attractive colours often suspect that deep within the house of their personality are less reputable selves, and sometimes in quiet moments, say of lonely wakefulness, queer forms creep up the cellar steps into the passage, and leer at them in the gloom. But these glimmering ghosts are quickly chased back into the cellar again and the door is slammed and locked. Such people hate the phantoms of their unattractive selves to escape from the cellar of the unconscious mind. The cellar is admittedly a better place to keep such ghosts than the living-room. But it would be better still to call them all up from the cellar, recognize them, and take steps to throw them out of the house of life for ever. The experience called conversion, if genuine, is a good, and often a speedy way of driving out devils and giving Christ the key of every room from attic to basement.

I am not going to spend any time this morning talking to those who *only* look at themselves through rose-coloured spectacles, because the time would be wasted. Until the spectacles crack and break, such people will probably refuse to be honest with themselves and to see themselves as they are. They can rarely be persuaded that they wear spectacles at all, and no one can help those who say, 'There is nothing wrong with me. Nothing is here for treatment or for adjustment. There is no meanness or jealousy, unkindness or resentment, hate or bad temper about me.' As Jesus said, with that sad irony of His: 'They that are whole have no need of a physician.'

But such people are in the minority. The greater number of people I meet look at themselves through dark lenses. They think the worst of themselves. They think of themselves as those who count for little, who are not much good, anyway, who have never been able to make much of a fist of life. The more they know

themselves, the more they tend to despise themselves, and some, who have been psycho-analysed, feel that they will never be happy again; such depths of depravity and poisoned motive and dark wells of beastliness have they found within themselves. Indeed, an hour of introspection seems to have made even St. Paul fall into something like despair about himself, a despair that only vanishes when he turns from himself to Christ. Listen to this 'For in me (that is, in my flesh) no good dwells, I know; the wish is there, but not the power of doing what is right. I cannot be good as I want to be, and I do wrong against my wishes. . . . I want to do what is right, but wrong is all I can manage; I cordially agree with God's law, so far as my inner self is concerned, but then I find another law in my members which conflicts with the law of my mind and makes me a prisoner to sin's law that resides in my members. . . . Miserable wretch that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? God will! Thanks be to Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.'<sup>1</sup>

The phrase St. Paul uses there, 'this body of death', is probably a reference to that awful method of punishment by which a corpse was strapped to the back of a criminal and he had to carry it about with him wherever he went. He could not remove it. He lay down with it at night. He rose up with it in the morning. The stench of its foul corruption was all about him. Even when he sat down to eat he could not escape it. The burden must have been intolerable. Paul uses it as a figure of speech to describe the inescapable burden of sin which man carries, and which he cannot get rid of by himself. 'Who will deliver me', he cries in anguish, 'from this body of death, this awful sense of burden and self-loathing, of failure and hopelessness?' And then we almost hear the bonds snapping and the horror falling away from him as he says: 'God will: through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Many, I feel, if they were honest and had Paul's gift of self-expression, would go all the way with him in his description of his spiritual despair, and yet, perhaps, could not go on with him to echo his glad, final cry, 'God will!' These are the people I should

<sup>1</sup> Romans vii. 18-25 (Moffatt's translation by permission of Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton).

like to help this morning, by getting them to take note of the way in which Paul himself offers encouragement and hope and release to those in the early Church who were as heavily burdened as we are.

How can release be obtained? It was to answer this question that I quoted such a rich sample of passages in which Paul says, 'Put on Christ'. You may possibly feel impatient at those three simple words. The disease is so terrible; the cure sounds so incredibly easy as to be ridiculously ineffective. Here is a man broken by evil, defeated by sin, crushed by its burden, and he goes to this master of the spiritual life, St. Paul, knowing that he too has passed through these self-same difficulties, and he says to St. Paul, 'What *am* I to do?' and Paul simply says, 'Put on Christ'. It sounds as simple as putting on a robe. Surely it cannot be as easy as that! Surely it means a long, difficult treatment! Surely it demands a tremendous self-discipline over a long period! But, no, again and again, to people far worse than ourselves. Paul repeats, 'Put on Christ. Put off the old man, put on the new man.' Well, this must be looked into! If this is true, it is the most wonderful news in the world.

I heard a little while ago, from a friend who has recently returned from Africa, of an African tribe that used to offer up human sacrifices. In one of their pagan rites the tribesmen demanded that a male member should be selected as the victim who must be put to death. A Government official, greatly loved and much admired, did all he knew to stop this practice, but in vain. In desperation, the official finally said: 'If you *will* do this, I demand the right to choose the next victim. You will find him to-morrow morning at dawn on the crest of that little hill, robed and veiled. That is the man you must take.' The next morning, as the sun came up, the tribesmen looked towards the top of this little knoll, and there stood their victim, robed and veiled, and, without any scrutiny, they took him and put him to death. When he was dead, they found that it was their beloved adviser, the Government official himself, the man who had pleaded with them to give up their evil ways, and who, finding his words were in vain, had

sealed his witness with his life. Is it too imaginative to press that story to our service this morning, and suggest that perhaps the robe which that Government official wore became for the tribe the symbol of lives that were changed through a noble death?

'Now', says Paul, 'put on Christ', as though the nature of Christ were a robe, the robe of One who can still change lives through a noble death; One whose words were beautiful and challenging and healing, but whose words were as nothing compared with the power of a life laid down. 'We preach', he said to the Corinthians, 'Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.'

You may say to me, 'Yes, but that's only an illustration, just a figure of speech. To think of the nature of Christ as a robe one can put on, may be a beautiful flight of imagination, but it leaves my nature untouched. Underneath the robe I am just the same as I was before.'

But wait a minute! Do you believe that Jesus Christ can change a person's life? Ask yourself that question as sincerely as you can. Do you believe that Christianity is a matter of coming to church, singing hymns, joining in prayers, listening to sermons, trying to live a good life by the power of your own will, or do you believe that at the heart of Christianity is a tremendous, dynamic, and transforming power, and that Christ can sweep into a man's life and change it utterly? I am going to assume that you believe the latter, for that is the truth of the matter. If it were not, Christianity would not have gone on for so long; would not have achieved the victories which it has achieved on all the shores of the world and through two thousand years of time.

If, then, you believe that, let me ask you the next question. When does that change begin? I say *begin* because, admittedly, it may take years to finish completely. But when does it begin? *It begins when you change your mental picture of yourself.* Our great grandfathers would have said that it begins when you put your faith in Christ. I am expressing the same message rather differently because we live in a different age. But, if you forget everything else in the sermon, try to take hold of this. *It begins when*



*you change your mental picture of yourself.* It begins when you see yourself no longer a man defeated by some secret sin, or shuffling along in a state of compromise; as a woman overwhelmed by all her problems, a pitiful, impoverished, weak, defeated person. It begins when you see yourself to be the kind of person that Christ can make you if He has His way with you. And when St. Paul says, 'put off the old man', he means put away the old picture of that broken, defeated prisoner of evil; clean the slate of the mind of that impression of yourself that shows you to be defeated, overwhelmed, incapable of being anything different from what you are now, and see yourself triumphant, victorious, serene, the master or the mistress of your own life.

I am going to ask everybody present to indulge in an imaginative flight that may seem fanciful, but, if you are in earnest about Christianity, please do this. Imagine that you are at this moment looking at yourself in a full-length mirror. You are clothed in black, the black of self-despising and failure and defeat. Then, as you continue to look in the mirror, Christ, wearing a red robe (and it would be red, wouldn't it?) comes alongside you, and He puts His red robe right round you. Now, when you look in the mirror, you are a person clothed in red, and you are a person very close to Christ, and that blessed union will make you like Him. It may take time admittedly, but already, *already*, you are a changed person, allied with Him in a new closeness of relationship. Something has begun—and I don't mind how much you emphasize the time it will take to complete the process—but something has begun which has already made you a person clothed in red instead of a person clothed in black. His radiant personality has done something already. In faith that the old self is dead, its mourning has been covered with resplendent crimson. You have reckoned yourself dead to sin. You dwell in Christ. You are one with Him. Your life is hid with Christ. You abide in Him. You have put on Christ.

'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him', said the Prodigal's

father in the famous story, and *that was done in a moment*. Only yesterday the Prodigal was in the far country amongst the swine and the sins, and, if you like to sound a pessimistic note, maybe to-morrow he will have some regrets at what has happened to-day, and think with evil longing of the delights of the far country. But look, he is wearing the robe of the son. He is different already. The relationship is different, and he himself knows in his heart that, although yesterday he was not only *with* the swine but one of them, to-day he is a son. He has put on the robe.

So it may be with you, my brother, my sister. You came into this church this morning in the black clothes of the spirit. You came in downhearted, frustrated, depressed, frightened, defeated, hopeless; one, if not more than one, of these things. And perhaps in your heart you were saying, 'It's no good trying. I'm no good. I hate myself, but I shall never be any different. Life is too hard for me. I give it up.'

Now, listen to the gospel! Put on Christ! Here is a new nature like a robe put around you by His loving arm. He is nearer to you than the person sitting next to you at this moment, and He is offering Himself to you. I beseech you, don't shrink away from Him. Let that loving arm come round you. Let that scarlet, blood-dyed robe be put over you. And then, above all, *never again look at your old self, wearing the black robe of self-despising, the dark clothes of inescapable failure and unconquerable sin*. 'Reckon ye yourselves dead unto sin. . . . Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.' Recall the passages I read to you at the beginning of the sermon. Listen while Paul exhausts language, weighing the vessels of his words down to the very water line to make them carry this precious new cargo of the Gospel for which no words that were adequate existed. 'You are dead,' he says, 'don't have anything to do with corpses.' That old despairing, timid, defeated person, that victim of sin's power, that plaything of hot lust is dead. All right! Have done with corpses! You are in Christ, and 'if any man be in Christ there is a new creation'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians v. 17 (R.V. margin).

Now please notice two further points:

- (1) The importance of seeing yourself thus, and
- (2) The importance of God seeing you thus.

(1) First of all, then, look at the importance of seeing yourself thus. Try to follow this rather carefully, if you will. You cannot be happy unless you can live with yourself. You cannot live with yourself, unless, at least to some extent, you like yourself. You cannot like yourself if you know yourself, and the better you know yourself the more you discover within yourself what is hateful, and the less you like yourself. So as life proceeds, things get worse and worse because as you get older, you will get to know yourself better, if you are honest, and thus hate yourself more. That explains why so many elderly people seem so pathetically hungry for the approval of others. The human mind needs appreciation as much as the body needs food and fresh air. Yet elderly people often find themselves out, and then begin to hate themselves secretly. The reason why they hunger for approval is that the approval of others is an anodyne to deaden the pain of hating themselves. They want others to bolster them up, to tell them they're not such bad folk after all. The approval of others counteracts to some extent their disapproval of themselves. But here, as in every dilemma of the human mind, the Christian Gospel comes with its complete answer. Thus: the only way to be independent of the approval of others is to approve of yourself, and, since he who knows himself can never approve of himself, your peace of mind depends on changing yourself, and your only hope of doing that is found in Christ. In Christ—or to keep the figure, by putting on the robe, by putting on Christ—you can exchange the self you hate for the new self He is creating, and you are to see yourself *already* as the kind of person you will certainly become, unless you throw off the robe and turn your back on Him.

But see the importance of looking upon yourself thus in another way. We all love to be loved, and, when things are not going well with us, we all love to get sympathy. But let me indicate one danger to those who, almost morbidly, demand sympathy from others. If you go about asking for sympathy, you are etching

deeper into the mind the picture of yourself as a person *needing* sympathy; that is a weak person. Those who have been deprived of love and whose nature is emotionally starved, tend, quite naturally, either to indulge in self-pity or to demand a great deal of sympathy from others, or both, for both are love-substitutes, and we want at all costs to be loved. But it would be healthier if, while we admitted our longing for the love of our fellow men and women, we refused to allow ourselves to live with a mental picture of ourselves that showed us to be the kind of people who *depended* on others. The line of the hymn:

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,

is literally true, though it may take years for us to realize it, and to 'put on Christ' means holding in our own minds a picture of ourselves as already the resplendent, scarlet-cloaked beings, the new men in Christ, which we are becoming in Him. Then, instead of needing sympathy, you become the kind of person who offers it to others; instead of showing a pitiful dependence on being loved, you go about amongst your fellows as one who offers love, and, strangely enough—because this is how God has arranged life—love comes back to the person who gives it, in a far greater measure than it comes to the man or woman who demands it. There is a very sound psychology, as well as a deep piety, behind the ancient prayer that says: 'Teach us, O Lord, not to seek so much to be consoled as to console; not so much to be understood as to understand; not so much to be loved as to love. Show us that it is in giving that we receive, in self-forgetting that we find; in dying that we waken to eternal life.'

Seeking always for sympathy has another bad effect on the soul. It undermines courage. It is easier to put the healing ointment of sympathy on the sore place than to find out why it becomes so sore. The reason is often a fear that must be rooted out or overcome. We tend to accept sympathy instead of facing the fear that makes us want sympathy. The more we can switch attention from the symptom of weakness to the action that will overcome it, the better. The sympathy of others is very lovely and we are entitled

to a measure of it as long as it does not become an anodyne for our own cowardice, and for the pain which the recognition of our cowardice would inflict upon us. To 'put on Christ' means identifying ourselves with One who will take us, cowards though we are, and change our nature so that we shan't need sympathy but become the kind of people who can give it. In Him, we shall assess courage higher than the need of sympathy. Emphasis on the latter makes us permanently weak characters. To see ourselves as courageous 'in Him', makes the beginning of strength, the strength of those who can 'stand their corner' and cope with their difficulties, and say with Paul: 'In Him that strengtheneth me I am able for anything.' As the new picture of ourselves 'in Him' grows stronger and clearer in our own minds we tend to become like it, and enjoy the power it brings more than we used to enjoy the sympathy of others concerning our weakness. It is better to be 'on top of things', as we say, with that exhilarating feeling of conquest, than underneath them, however sympathetic people may be with us in our adversities.

(2) Secondly, turn to the importance of God seeing us as new men in Christ. You will remember that poem of Tennyson called 'The Ancient Sage', where, talking about faith, he says:

She spies the summer through the winter bud,  
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,  
She hears the lark within the songless egg,  
She finds the fountain where they wailed 'Mirage'.

That is how God looks at you. Remember that God is not imprisoned in time. You can only see yourself as you are now, and you feel that years and years of hard climbing stretch before you. But I am sure it is true to say that God's assessment of our character is not in terms of present achievement, but of tendency and direction. God, from beyond the time prison, can see you as already perfected; can see you as you are bound to become unless you creep out from under that robe—the robe of Christ's nature—and cut yourself off from its power. And frankly, God can only receive you—since He is utterly righteous and perfectly holy—

not as you are in yourself now, for in you is no worth at all, but as you are in Christ. Man only has worth in what he is capable of becoming, and he is only capable of becoming his maximum through Christ. If I may coin a word, man's 'worthness' is established not in any value he can attain by his own efforts, merit or abilities, but because of what Christ can make of him. That which he of himself could never become, and that which men would deny as being of any value, is worth a lot to the God who sees him in Christ—a Christ who thought man was worth dying for. As Browning says:

All I could never be,  
All men ignored in me,  
This was I worth to God . . .

Thus, in a beautiful Communion hymn, we pray that God will 'only look on us as found in Him'.

I charge you, then, to make this day the day of your conversion. Many of us have never been converted. We have been brought up in Christian homes, but, to be quite honest, we have been content with a conventional sham. The transforming power of Christ has never been released into our lives. We sing the hymns and say the words, but they are forms without the fire. If you doubt this, ask yourself two or three questions of great significance. Could you lead another to Jesus Christ? Have you found something in Him that you could pass on? If the early Christians had been like you, do you think Christianity would have spread through the pagan world? We are shy of the very word 'conversion'. We think it is something to do with emotional excitement, with revivalistic meetings that nice, respectable, cultured, well-educated people despise. But, men and women, conversion, which of course may be a highly emotional experience, has much more to do with a simple act of obedience and with a simple turning towards Christ in some quiet hour of the soul's revelation of its own most desperate need. Don't wait for some great dramatic event or emotional experience. Christ offers Himself to you. Take Him in faith. Don't bother about your feelings. Indeed, you may *feel* no different

as you leave this place this morning. But 'put on Christ'. Make a beginning with Him and re-affirm that dear allegiance every morning. Alter your mental picture of yourself, and see yourself, by His grace, as already the changed personality which deep in your heart you desire to be.

But I must give you some warnings.

(1) You will often want to slip back and be the 'old man' you used to be. That 'old man' is an old friend, and it is easier to live with old friends than with new friends. Christ, the new Friend, will make new demands, set up new conflicts, bring new challenges. For that reason, many in the early days of Christian discipleship find life much harder and less happy. There was no conflict before, no challenge. They pursued the path of their own will. Now they are pulled up at nearly every step. But if you slip out from under the robe, slip back again, and if you fall and put off Christ, then put on Christ again every eventide.

(2) The devil will try to tempt you that nothing has happened at all, that all that I have been saying is just imaginative talk. Well, recall that the triumphant history of the Christian Church through years of persecution, and the history of the Church that is being written now—where in India and China and Africa men are finding these old New Testament words the very power of God—adequately answer that argument. Why shouldn't it all be true for you?

(3) You will hesitate to believe that your personality is being changed, and, like a frightened horse, you will tremble and shy at the dangers in the road. I would say to you, 'Never mind if you do tremble! Put this newly-seen, new-born personality to the test. If you believe in yourself, you will find that the new self is stronger than the old, for Christ's personality is now added to yours, and if you feel like trembling, well, tremble!' Do you remember that lovely story of Turenne, the beloved Marshal of France, who sacrificed so much that he might maintain his Christian Protestant witness? When he was shaving just before a battle, his hand trembled violently, and he turned on his own body and said this: 'Tremblest thou, vile carcass? Thou wouldst't tremble more if thou

knewest where I am going to take thee this day.' But though he trembled, he went on. I tremble too, grow sick with feelings of fear, feel my heart turn to lead within my breast. But when I have had the courage to put 'the new man' to the test, Christ has never let me down.

(4) Remember, lastly, that often when you don't feel any different, and when you feel a failure, neither God nor others see you thus. How well I remember in Leeds a man coming into my vestry and giving me five pounds for the poor because his daughter's life had been changed in a service that I conducted. He said that the whole atmosphere of the home was different. Yet, five minutes earlier, the girl herself had been talking to me in great depression and almost in tears because she felt such a failure and because, though she sought to follow Christ, she found her home life overwhelmingly hard and thought her witness a failure.

In my study a week or two ago a ministerial friend told me this lovely story. He said that, when he was a little boy, he was out for a walk with his father and they saw a most vivid rainbow, the end of which lit up the rocks quite near the path along which they were walking. The little boy said to his father, 'Daddy, let me go and stand in the light of the rainbow', and off he went. But, of course, to the boy the light of the rainbow was always a little bit farther on and never seemed to bathè him in its splendour. But when his father looked at his dear son, the glory of the rainbow light seemed to transfigure him. When we set ourselves to leave the paths of selfishness along which we have been walking, and seek to enter into spiritual realities, the light of the glory of God seldom seems to be round about us. It always seems a little farther on. Sometimes we grow disheartened and depressed. Achievement falls so short of desire. But I think when our heavenly Father looks upon us He sees the light of spiritual beauty around us because the glory of Christ transfigures a man immediately he steps off the path of selfish desire and longs to be caught up into the light and life of God. You may not discern the light around you, but God sees it and, more often than we think, other people do too.

. . . . .



Lift up your hearts, then, and take courage, for the man who 'puts on Christ' has nothing to fear in this life or the next. Claim your inheritance as a child of God. Realize yourself united with Christ and, remembering that Christ is God and that you are linked with Him, remember that there is no power of evil which can defeat God, nor anything that can possibly happen in this world or another that can overwhelm the man who is one with God in Christ. That is what made John Wesley translate the poems of Zinzendorf thus:

Jesu, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in Thy great day:  
For who aught to my charge shall lay?  
Fully absolved through these I am,  
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

O let the dead now hear Thy voice,  
Now bid Thy banished ones rejoice,  
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,  
Jesu, Thy blood and righteousness!

Put on Christ! Do it now in the hush of this quiet place, in the silence that follows this sermon, as though just you and Christ were alone in a vast solitude. Bow before Him in adoration and worship until you feel the robe of His loving nature put around you, and realize that, worthless in yourself, He thought you worth dying for, and will never leave you until He has made you all His own. All life can be different for you after this morning. Don't let anything put you off this great transaction. 'If *any man* be in Christ there is a new creation.' Why not you?

## TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

THERE is a familiar passage in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which runs thus:

This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

As we have often reminded ourselves, we are each a number of selves. Often those selves are in conflict with one another. To harness them all and make them all pull the way of our highest purposes, and thus our truest well-being, is the life-long task over which none of us can afford to be dilatory. That task is called by some psychologists the 'integration of personality'. Others speak of 'adjustment to life', or the 'co-ordination of the instincts'. Lovers of Trine speak of being 'in tune with the infinite'. Whatever we call it, we know that our truest 'self' evolves and emerges to a place of dominance as this task is successfully achieved. We each become a unity and attain peace within.

To fail in this task of integration and to allow, what we may call for the moment, our lower selves to have their way, is to lose our inner peace and, ultimately, to be disgusted with ourselves—in a literal sense our-selves—and to land ourselves, either on this side of the grave or the other, in remorse. To quote Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem about 'The Murdered Selves':

I do not see them here: but after death  
God knows, I know the faces I shall see,  
Each one a murdered self, with low, last breath.  
'I am thyself,—What hast thou done to me?'  
'And I—and I—thyself,' (lo, each one saith),  
'And thou thyself to all eternity!'

The true self is in harmony with God's will at each point of its journey. Finding what His will is, becomes a demand made on every sincere Christian soul. Recently, from this pulpit and on

the wireless, I have spoken of ways in which we can discern His will: and one of them was a consideration of the advice of others and of the dictates of our own common sense.

Yet, for the man who would be true to himself and follow the voice of God within the soul, there may often come the demand that he should discount the advice of friends, and even the dictates of common sense, in order to be true to himself.

There is an incident in the life of the Master which lights this up for us. Jesus had been away in Tyre for nearly a year. We know this because just before He went we read of the green grass on which the five thousand reclined while they were fed, and then the Gospel narrative takes up the thread of our Lord's life again at Passover-time which, of course, corresponds with our Easter. From early summer the grass in Palestine is brown. No one could describe it as green, so that probably it is right to assume, as Professor Burkitt does, that Jesus was away at Tyre for at least nine months. During that period, hardly anything is known of His movements or His words.

Such study as I have been able to pursue makes me certain that during that period a revolution took place in His own mind. It is no disparagement of our Lord to say that, since His was a human mind, it could only receive the revelations of God slowly. Indeed, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, 'He learned by the things He suffered'.<sup>1</sup> 'Learning' involves something done gradually, and I believe that Jesus was led step by step to understand the unfolding purpose of God for His life. At first, I think, He thought His ministry was to the Jews only, and He said so: 'I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel'<sup>2</sup>—words which He may have spoken at the beginning of His visit to Tyre. He was to be the *Jewish* Messiah. But away in the solitude of Tyre He learnt God's developing plan. He was not to be the Jewish Messiah only, but the Saviour of the world. And He was not to win by living. He was to win by dying.

Immediately He came back from Tyre, He began *for the first time* to speak about His death, and *for the first time* to speak about a

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew xv. 24.

message to the whole world. Now Peter loved Him dearly. Naturally He could not bear to think of His Master's death. 'Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee.'<sup>1</sup> But Jesus turned and said unto Peter: 'Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art a stumbling block unto Me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.'

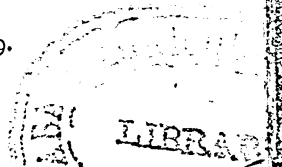
The words sound harsh, but if you have just come to a decision which has cost you immense anguish of mind, and which is far removed from your former plans and natural desires, the advice of a friend to tread the path you have just decided to eschew, imposes an almost intolerable strain. It arouses again in the heart the fierce temptation which, only with difficulty, has just been conquered. I am quite sure, in my own mind, that the measure of the violence of Jesus is the measure of the strength of the temptation which Peter's advice aroused again in His mind. Jesus was completely human, as well as in a unique sense divine. He was a young, fit Man who hoped to live. He was a great Teacher who desired to be followed. He had the natural shrinking from death which we all have, plus the human fear that His whole ministry would fail if He could not establish it in what we call success. At the very last He prayed: 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.'<sup>2</sup>

It is true that the violence of Jesus to Peter is not as severe as our Western minds suppose. The word 'Satan' is not so unkind as it sounds. A friend of mine, travelling in Jerusalem a few years before the war, heard one cabby call another 'Satan'. The Arabs still use the word for someone who gets in the way, and St. Matthew's word 'stumbling-block' conveys the sense in which the word is still used.

But, in the incident, I want us to see that Jesus did not always follow the advice of friends or the dictates of common sense, both of which would have pointed the way to safety. We see Him running counter to the wishes of others because He had to be true to that best self—the self that was dedicated to doing the will of God. And, from His own experience, Jesus whispers to us, 'to thine own self be true'.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew xvi. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew xxvi. 39.



If Jesus had listened to the advice of others at some points in His ministry, perhaps we should never have heard of Him. No doubt, Mary, on the advice of the local pastor at Nazareth, had said, in earlier days, 'But, dear, You have never had a rabbi's training. Why can't You stay quietly at home?' No doubt, James, His brother, on whom, in the absence of Jesus, heavy responsibility would fall, since Joseph was by this time dead, said, 'Do You expect *me* to run the business?' Peter said, in regard not only to the path of suffering but the path of duty, 'Be it far from Thee, Lord', and there is evidence that the other disciples 'walked no more with Him',<sup>1</sup> because His interpretation of Messiahship was so utterly different from their own. In fact, they said to Him, 'Why don't you use Your power and set up Your Kingdom and reign?' and the Devil had whispered this to Him<sup>2</sup> before the disciples thought of it. But Jesus kept on in order that He might be true to Himself.

In other spheres of life men have done the same with immense benefit to the world, and I think it would thrust home our message this morning if we glanced down the corridors of history and noted briefly a dozen instances of this.

1. Here is Copernicus, the Polish doctor and priest, stating his astronomical theory in the face of all the learning of his day, and, more right than he ever knew, changing all men's thoughts of the universe. He was true to himself with immense benefit to science.

2. Here is Galileo, watching a lamp swinging in the cathedral at Pisa, when he ought to have been listening to the sermon, and deducing conclusions which in 1616 led him to assert that the earth went round the sun. Incredible as it may seem, the Roman Catholic authorities made such a statement a religious heresy. They clung to the current belief that the earth was the fixed centre of the universe. Galileo was hauled before the Inquisition, who threatened him with such torture that he recanted in 1632. After recantation, it is said, he rose to his feet and muttered, '*E pur si muove*' 'But it does move'. He was true to himself, with immense benefit to astronomy.

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 66-7.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew iv. 8-10.

3. Here is Luther, the first Protestant, saying bravely in the face of all that Roman Catholic authority could do to hurt him: 'Here stand I, I can no other, so help me God!' He was true to himself with immense benefit to religion.

4. Here is Columbus seeking support for his 'mad enterprise', begging for ships, derided at court, disbelieved at last even by his own men, but determined 'to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield'. He was true to himself with immense benefit to our knowledge of the world.

5. Here is Joan of Arc, a mere slip of a girl, chided and derided, but canonized at last by the Roman Catholic Church that burnt her, and doing more good since her execution than before it. She was true to herself and has ever since been an inspiration to all who read her story.

6. Here is John Wesley, who preached from this very pulpit, and who was harried by the Church of England partly because he would not observe the etiquette of not preaching in another's parish without permission. 'The world is my parish' was his challenging response to his critics. He was true to himself, and the historian John Richard Green tells us that John Wesley saved this country from revolution in the eighteenth century. More importantly, he saved men and women from despair, and spiritually set the whole country alight with his evangelism.

7. William Booth inaugurated the Salvation Army, which now is praised by kings, but which, in its early days, was stoned and persecuted, and its leader and founder treated with ridicule. Almost all his friends tried to persuade William Booth to settle down in a local chapel as a Methodist minister, but he was true to himself, and every true Christian must thank God for the grand work which the Salvation Army has done on all shores until the present day.

8. Here is Robertson Smith, a religious leader at the other end of the intellectual scale from William Booth, perhaps the most brilliant Old Testament scholar our nation has produced, but equally one of God's pioneers. At twenty-three he was appointed Professor of Oriental Languages and Old Testament Exegesis at

the Free Church College, Aberdeen. Practically all Biblical scholars now accept his conclusions, but when he announced them, he was tried for heresy and hounded out of his chair and no longer allowed to be a professor. In the book he afterwards published, *The Old Testament and the Jewish Church*, he vindicated his position. He was editor of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and in 1883 was appointed Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University. He was true to himself, to the great benefit of honest thinking and the cause of truth.

9. Woodrow Wilson is accounted by many a failure. I think of him as a man who was true to himself. When he arrived in London people cheered him in the streets, and at one time the hopes of the world seemed centred in him. Crafty French politicians proved too much for him and he died of a broken heart. But his soul goes marching on, and still his principles are the only ones on which we may hope to build a peace that is anything more than an uneasy truce.

10. Frederick Atkins, the journalist, has told the story of his brilliant colleague, H. W. Massingham, a journalist who was three times thrown out of an editorial chair because he and the proprietor of his newspaper lived in different worlds. Massingham lived in the world of right and wrong. The proprietors concerned apparently lived in the world of profit and loss. A writer in the *New Statesmen* said of Massingham: 'He cared nothing for money or fame or praise, but he had a furious and impersonal desire for the welfare of the world which literally consumed his energies and destroyed his peace of mind.' Massingham was true to himself to the great benefit of honest journalism.

11. We all know the story of Oates, who accompanied Scott to the South Pole and who, contrary to all the dictates of common sense and the advice of friends, walked out into the blizzard that terrible night, 'a very gallant gentleman' who would not let his own sufferings hold up his friends. But not everybody realizes that Edward Wilson, the frail doctor, accompanied the same expedition. Wilson had suffered in earlier days from tuberculosis of the lungs and had the greatest difficulty in persuading medical authorities, and, indeed, Captain Scott himself, to allow him to go with

the expedition. But in one of the tenderest letters ever written, Scott wrote as follows to Mrs. Wilson:<sup>1</sup>

'If this letter reaches you, Bill [Dr. Wilson] and I will have gone out together. We are very near it now, and I should like you to know how splendid he was at the end—everlastingly cheerful and ready to sacrifice himself for others, never a word of blame to me for leading him into this mess. His eyes have a comfortable, blue look of hope and his mind is peaceful with the satisfaction of his faith in regarding himself as part of the great scheme of the Almighty. I can do no more to comfort you than to tell you that he died as he lived, a brave, true man; the best of comrades and staunchest of friends.'

12. We might conclude our list with Mr. Winston Churchill, who has never once said, 'I told you so', but, if we had heeded that lonely voice in 1918 as to the best way of treating the defeated German nation, I feel quite certain myself that we should not have had to defeat Germany over again at such terrible cost in the lives of brave men.

The voice of the people may sometimes be the voice of God, as the popular Latin tag says—*vox populi, vox Dei*.<sup>2</sup> The wisdom of friends may often guide us. The voice of common sense may, indeed, be a true pointer. But sometimes both will mislead. No one will say to us, 'Be it far from thee, Lord!' but they will say, 'Don't be silly, Tom', or, 'I'm only advising you in your own interests, Joan'. It is hard to oppose the advice of those we love. And again and again, even when we've taken the difficult step, the way seems so much harder than we dreamed, that our own minds fill with misgiving. At such times a man must be alone and be quiet enough to hear the voice of God and not allow the *vox populi* to deafen him. It was the *vox populi* that cried, 'Away with this Man; Crucify Him!' And when I think of Rupert Brooke and

<sup>1</sup> Scott's *Last Expedition* (John Murray).

<sup>2</sup> Accuracy demands the admission that the tag, ascribed to Alcuin, in a letter to Charlemagne, probably meant originally that the voice of the people is irresistible.



Wilfred Owen, and countless others in whose breasts burned the divine fire, I sometimes wonder just how much crucifixion has been done through the voice of the people.

The picture in my own mind at the moment is that of a sensitive compass needle. A mysterious, unseen power swings it to the north and points out the way. But let a bag of steel nails come near the compass and the needle will turn anywhere but north. You must take it right away from those influences and let it respond only to the Mysterious Power if you wish to get a true reading. So, deep in every man's nature, a Mysterious Power is at work which no one can quite understand, but which no one can safely explain away. Left to itself, it will point out our true direction. As I brood on the incident in our Lord's life, I feel that I must say to you and to myself that the presence and advice of others must be considered. Indubitably, sometimes, God guides us through them, but, every discerning spirit would do well, having listened, to go away into a solitary place, and, putting everything else on one side, listen and wait for that Mysterious Power which cannot always make its presence felt amid the babble of other tongues and the confusion of other voices.

Nor is it only other voices that can disturb the poise of the spirit. Our instincts—which in my own mind I reduce to three in number, self and sex and social—while they are amoral in themselves, that is, neither moral nor immoral apart from our own handling of them, tend to pull us toward the lower paths of life. With the emotions that are attached to them, they form the driving power of personality. One might call them the engine of the mind, but he who drives the engine knows how hard it is to direct and control them. The self instinct *tends* to make us selfish. The sex instinct *tends* to make us give rein to sexual impulses. The herd or social instinct *tends* to make us go with the crowd. I think the saints would be unanimous in saying that spiritual achievement involves a battle with the instincts.

The irreligion all around us is another factor which disturbs the poise of the compass needle of which I have spoken. We frequently comment that this is an irreligious age, but we do not

always realize that our own communion with God, and our sensitiveness to His voice, are always threatened by the irreligion which is characteristic of all civilized countries at the present day.

We see this not only in religion, but in other ways too. Your taste for Beethoven would tend to disappear if you heard nothing but jazz. Your taste for great literature would tend to disappear if you read nothing but fourpenny novelettes. Your taste for great drama would lose its appetite if you saw only those sexy plays which are part of the garbage found in the track of a decadent civilization. Your taste for simple joys and homely pleasures would tend to disappear if continually you tried to speed up the tempo of life by hectic gambling and drinking to excess. When Ruskin said, 'If I read this, I cannot read that'—which I think is one of the most profound things ever said by anybody—he did not mean if I read this, I shall not have *time* to read that, though such a statement is true. He meant if I read this, I shall lose my taste for reading that. I shall satisfy one self, but be false to my true self.

There are cases of physical illness, the diagnosis of which is clearly manifested to the physician partly by the symptom of loss of appetite. It is not true to say that the patient does not *need* food, but it is only too true to say that the patient does not *want* food. We need God, but many are in the state of being unable to want Him. They cannot make themselves want Him. They have lost their taste for Him.

You do not need to be a psycho-analyst to interpret this dream of a patient. 'I dream', he said, 'that I pay a visit to the zoo and find a great number of animals all together in one cage. I advance to the bars of the cage to feed the animals, and I see at the back of the cage a gentle and graceful gazelle, who looks at me mournfully with big, brown velvet eyes. I would like to feed the gazelle, but against the bars of the cage, rushing up and down, clamouring voraciously for food, are lions and tigers and wolves. My attempt to feed the gazelle is defeated by the clamorous demands of wilder animals, and in my dream the gazelle sinks down and dies.' That is a picture of the selves within the cage of human personality. But so

often the true self is at the back of the cage, gentle, pathetic, pleading, but not getting its food because of the hungry demands of things like selfishness, or sex desire, or ruthless determination to get on in the world, or the wish to be like others and to keep in with the crowd. So the true self languishes and is near to death, while the more brutish selves eat and drink their fill.

Let us get right away from famous names and consider a very human story. I read recently of a girl who was sought by two lovers. One was a sleek and wealthy youth who took her out in his car to expensive places of entertainment and refreshment. Flowers were sent to her nearly every day. She could have had a house in Mayfair, a cottage in the country, and a month a year in the South of France. Every whim would have been gratified by the rich lover. His rival was a poor youth who wore a shabby tweed coat and grey flannel trousers. He wrote poetry and book reviews, both of which were generally refused by the papers to which he sent them. He entertained her at Lyons' and took her tramping in the country. If he married her, it would mean three rooms at most and, with luck, a week in the summer at Skegness. The parents backed the sleek gentleman. All the girl's friends thought she would be what they called 'sensible'. If she had mentioned Bob the scribbler, they would have as good as said, 'Be it far from thee'. She gave no hint of her choice. One night she would go in a Rolls Royce to the Carlton, and then to a box at the theatre. The next night she would go in a bus to Tottenham Court Road, dine at a cheap restaurant, and go to the pictures. It was a great drama for all her friends to watch. Would the girl have the grit to defy the purse-proud climber, and throw away the furs and pearls and cars and houses waiting to be picked up? 'Then,' says the narrator of this true story, 'I found she was learning shorthand. I asked her why. "Why?" she demanded, her eyes blazing. "To help Bob, of course." So the poor scribbler had won.' The girl was true to herself. 'Sometimes', says the narrator, 'I drop into their rooms. They haven't much money. They seem to live on music, books, plays, ideas, dreams, and

arguments. But they are very happy. They laugh a great deal, and when I imagine the money-smothered life she might have lived, I feel glad because of her grit.'

Don't misunderstand this illustration. I am not making any cheap sneer about money. If she had *loved* the rich youth, it would have been right to marry him. But sometimes it does your soul good to hear of a person who, after quiet thought, pushes away the advice of friends and the apparent dictates of common sense, and obeys the inward voice, responds to the Mysterious Power that swings the needle of the soul. It does you good to hear of someone who defies common sense and does what the world calls mad, who, in her own little sphere, says with Luther: 'Here stand I, I can no other, so help me God.'

Yes, there is something to be said for using our own judgement. Only this to be said for it: that it isn't our own at all, but God's. When we are sure of that, we can do without other people's advice though it's advisable to listen to it. We can even disregard common sense. For where He leads, there the light shines.

Only one last point. Even a magnetized needle gets demagnetized in time. I saw one two days ago that revolved aimlessly round and round the card. They re-magnetize the compass needle by bringing it in close contact with a very powerful magnet. . . . You can see the point of the parable. I need not labour an interpretation. But let me say this. Maybe you have drifted into this church this morning, bewildered and confused and wondering which way to go. More than that, perhaps you have fallen in with a group of people who are shouting directions in your ear, and maybe what they call 'common sense' is clamouring to be noticed. I want to suggest that God may have brought you in here that you may become quiet enough to hear what *He* has to say. There is a space of silence after this sermon. Christ is present in this church at this moment, nearer than the person sitting next to you. Supposing you let Him re-magnetize the needle. Supposing, then, you kneel quietly and let the needle point which way it will. It will direct your life back to God, and I am certain

then that you won't lose your way. 'Love God', cried St. Augustine, 'and do what you like.' Yes, because loving God determines what you *do* like. Loving God murders the false selves and delivers the true self from the greedy mouths and dripping fangs of those baser selves that strive with it. Here is peace, then, in this place, and quiet, and God. 'To thine own self be true.'

## AS A TALE THAT IS TOLD

LET us put together two passages from great literature:  
 Psalm xc. 9: 'We spend our years as a tale that is told.'  
*Macbeth*, Act v, Scene 5:

Life . . . is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
 Signifying nothing.

New Year's Sunday morning is a good time to examine those two passages. The spending of our years, says the Psalmist, is like a tale that is told. But, says *Macbeth*, it is a 'tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing'.

It is easy to look at the picture in the mind of the Psalmist. Let me sketch it with a few rough strokes as I saw it during my life in the East. The land of Abraham. The vast desert. A community of people eking out the meagre existence of the nomad. Life is spent amongst camels, sheep, and goats. In the centre of the camp, set a little apart, is the goat-hair tent of the Sheik, divided one-third of the way down by a curtain, behind which are the women's quarters. It is evening. The meal is ready. There would be on the ground a heap of cooked rice, with portions of chicken in it. The men partake first, sitting on the floor and using their right hands only. Following the chicken, dates and figs might be served. The servant washes the right hand of each guest between the courses. When you have eaten as much as you want, the dogs and the hens come in and conveniently clear up the fragments. Then you adjourn to the other end of the tent and gather round a brazier, or a fire made on the ground. There are carpets and rugs on which you may recline, with cushions for your elbow. The fire-light throws long, flickering shadows as the darkness falls. There are no side curtains to the tent and you may see the moon lifting

her beams above the desert's edge, lighting the world with her supernatural radiance. There is the scent of fragrant coffee and the men have begun to smoke their hookahs. Entertainment is desired, and it may be that the sheik will entertain his guests by calling in the dancing girls, with graceful forms and a dark beauty of their own. On the other hand, the sheik may call for the official teller of stories, and there, in the quiet of the evening, you may recline and listen to a tale. This, I suppose, is the oldest entertainment in the world.

It must be a good story. There must at least be three things about it.

1. It must have a moral. It is an interesting and rather surprising thing that the great, old stories of the world, like Aesop's fables, for instance, all have a moral.

2. The story must have a purpose. I have known the Arabs hiss a man from the tent whose story ran out into meaninglessness, like a stream that failed in the desert. It may be 'a tale full of sound and fury', but if it signifies nothing the teller will probably be driven out into the darkness.

3. The story must have a satisfying end. If the end is surprising, all the better. I have known the most amazing stories unfolded and brought to such wonderful conclusions that the audience breathes that kind of sigh that expresses both surprise and satisfaction. It is interesting that Dr. Moffatt translates our text: 'Our life is over like a sigh.'

Let us apply to life this metaphor of the story told. We shall find that whether we think of life as an individual affair, or the life of the community, or even the life of the nation, the three points we have made about a good story apply.

1. *The story must have a moral.* I think the moral of this strange story that we call human life is that men must co-operate with God, both in their own interests and in order that they may glorify Him. On the way home, think over the chain of thoughts which I am about to give you and tell me afterwards if there is a weak link in the chain. I will not use the word 'proof', for in religion scientific proof is impossible, but these sentences bring my

own mind to certainty as convincingly as science does. Here they are:

(1) It is incredible that behind all the order we see in the universe there is no mind, and, inasmuch as our minds *recognize* order, that mind must be something like our own.

(2) It is incredible that such a Mind, if it be regarded as the creative force in the universe, is not personal and good, for we manifest both personality and goodness, and it is incredible that that which is created is higher in our own scale of values, than that which created it. God—to give this personal Mind a name—may be, and probably is, much more than our word 'personality' connotes, as He is more than our word 'good' connotes, but He cannot be less in either case.

(3) It is incredible that this personal, good, creative Mind has no moral purpose in the lives of men, for even we have such purposes in the lives of children committed to us.

(4) It is incredible that God cannot make known His purposes to men, since He seems to have ordained that their success depends on man's co-operation. To ordain that man's rightly used freewill can serve His purposes, but to withhold from man any notion of what those purposes are, would be foolish and unjust.

(5) It is incredible that ultimately God can be defeated. He may be temporarily defeated by our lack of co-operation, but it is incredible that a Mind big enough to create this universe, a Mind that is personal and good and purposeful, should be defeated in His ultimate plans by the creatures He made, and be unable to bring the story of human life to a morally satisfying end.

If there is a weak link in this chain of sentences, which, in an hour of black doubt, I wrote down for my own comfort, I cannot find it, and the whole chain seems to me to indicate the moral running through the whole story of life. The moral of the story is, 'Co-operate with God, for He is working out a purpose that is greater and grander than any human mind can grasp'.

. . . . .



I have a feeling that many who have come into this church this morning are depressed. Is it any wonder? Few things depress us more than hope deferred.<sup>1</sup> Supposing on Christmas Eve you had told your children that the celebrations of Christmas Day were to be deferred for six months. There were to be no presents, no fun, no feasting. What a depressing affair Christmas Day would have been! Now, we were promised peace by Christmas. We nearly bought our flags. Some firms actually advertised and displayed them. Then we learnt that peace was postponed. It is no wonder that we suffered a sense of depression. Many, over Christmas, have been separated from those they love and are worried about them. Hitler's bombs are still falling upon us. The weather has been difficult. Our nerves are strained. Most of us have got colds . . . It is a dull chapter in the tale.

But let me try to cheer you up this morning with some very bright facts which even this dull chapter contains; facts that reveal the emergence of moral gain. Let me make it very clear that war was not part of the intention of God, and these facts which I want to give you, though we may say they have come out of the evil womb of war, did not need war for their birth. They might have been born by high vision in days of peace. But they provide an illustration for the secular mind of man's response to the challenge of war's horror, and, for the religious mind, of God's way of bringing good out of man's evil.

I shall not discuss them, but merely state them:

(1) Granted that victory is deferred, remember that *two years ago* the most optimistic prophet never dreamed that we should be as far on the road to victory as we are at the present moment. And who, in the hour when Ribbentrop gloated over Germany's non-aggression pact with Russia, could have supposed that Russia's armies would deal such a decisive blow to German tyranny?

(2) The Education Act, with all its faults, is a mighty stride

<sup>1</sup> In the autumn of 1944 the Allies drove the Germans out of France and Belgium and most of Holland, and it was believed, even in high places that the end of the war would come by the Christmas of that year.

forward. Without the challenge of wartime, how long would it have been before we realized how needful that Act is?

(3) There is a new concern about national health. No satisfactory system is yet to hand, but, compared with any other country in the world, the concern of the state for the health of the people is high indeed.

(4) The field of industrial production is full of hope. I was delighted to read in the *National News-Letter* (December 28, 1944) these words: 'Britain is forging ahead in the field of human relationships in industry. Here again a new spirit is abroad; managers and trade union leaders are at least beginning to realize that they must work together, that the welfare and the general attitude of the workers is an essential factor in industry, and that without contented and healthy workers all hopes for efficiency and social security must collapse.'

Not only is there a new relationship, but new articles are being produced, and one cannot be blind to the promise involved in that fact. In other words, industrial production is so immense, and its range so extended, that, if it can be maintained, unemployment is likely to be a thing of the past.

(5) The Government, which has accepted the bulk of the Beveridge Scheme, is committed to some form of social security for all who need it from the cradle to the grave. 'Full employment in a free society,' to quote the title of Sir William Beveridge's last book, is almost a certainty. Not only the scheme outlined by Sir William Beveridge, but its modification, to which the Government has already committed itself, is designed to ensure that no man or woman in Britain, who is willing and able to work, shall be without a job except for brief periods of temporary unemployment, for which allowance is made in the plans for social security.

Whether you realize it or not, when we add those five facts together, we find that a revolution has already taken place in Britain. And when you are depressed and feel that all wartime is wasted time, that life is passing like a dull tale that is told; or

when you feel worse and almost believe that it is a 'tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing', don't lose sight of these facts. Ask yourself under what conditions of complacent progress during a period of uneasy truce, miscalled peace, these things could have come to birth. Once more, I reiterate, war is not essential to them. A bad thing like war cannot create good things like those I have described, but they are the response of a people to an awakening which war has effected, and human history, if you will forgive the pun, is His-story. It is not, as Mark Twain described it, 'a rather discreditable incident on one of the minor planets', but a great epic which reveals where true values lie and how they come to find vindication.

In passing, another most enheartening sign of the times is that, during the days of the week just gone, a conference has been meeting in the Westminster Central Hall, consisting of 2,500 young people between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. They gave up a week of their Christmas holidays to discuss 'Education for World Citizenship'. To meet some of these young people is to be thrilled by their serious interest in the new world which they will be called upon to build.

2. *Further, this human story is a story with a purpose.* The trouble about it is that men will not stay to ask what the purpose is and whose it is. They suppose that it is man's and that its objective is what he calls progress. It is not. It is God's. The purpose of human life, undoubtedly, is to bring all men and all nations into harmony with the mind and will of God, living together to promote God's glory and further His purposes. And that alone is true progress. A few weeks ago we printed on our Order of Service, as our 'Thought for the Week' these words from Principal Oman:

'The very secret of all profitable use of life is just to abandon the expectation that it ever was designed to forward persons devoted to material and merely worldly purposes, with no higher ends than gain or pleasure or pride of place, and to discern that naturally the only ends it could have been designed to serve are God's.'

I learn that some friends found the sentence too involved for them. We might paraphrase it by saying\* that the only way of making sense of life, of getting the best out of life, of realizing the meaningfulness of life, is to part at once with the idea that it exists to further man's selfish aims and materialistic ambitions. It was created to serve one Person's purposes only: God's. But remember also that part of God's glory is the promotion of man's highest good. Anyone, however, who tries to twist the universe for his own selfish purposes, or make it yield its secrets for his own private profit, is only asking for the trouble that will certainly follow. The whole trend of the universe, visible and invisible, is towards goodness. It is built to further the purposes of God, not man. If you fight the universe you only get broken. You may appear to defeat God, but you don't really defeat Him for, if He cannot use you as an agent, willingly and co-operatively, He will use you as an instrument though you get broken in the using. But, obviously, the only ends that the universe is constructed to serve are God's, and that is not a harsh thing to say, for He knows far better than we do that our own highest good is found in harmony with His purpose, and that disaster for ourselves would be inevitable if He left us to our own ways.

Let us go back to the simile of the story. Miss Winifred Holtby was severely criticized by one critic for her novel, *South Riding*. The critic said that there was 'no completely praiseworthy person in the whole book'. Miss Holtby made a very clever reply: 'I intended to make them good', she said, 'but they would not be.' I believe other novelists have found the same thing. A character is created with a certain intention, but the pressure of events has such an effect on the character that the novelist is bound to make him behave in ways unintended at first, for, of course, the psychological unity of the character must be maintained. If it is not irreverent to put it thus, God could answer Macbeth in a similar way to that in which Miss Holtby replied to her critic. Macbeth says, 'Life is a tale, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. God might have said, 'But I made them with the intention that they should be good, and they would not be'. The pressure of evil events spoilt

the intention of the Creator of the characters. But wait! If Winifred Holtby had not been so modest, she might have claimed that, even in face of all the things that went wrong, she made a fine story that turned out well at last. Will God do less? In spite of the pressure of evil events; in spite of the individual tendency to take the easy way; in spite of the dread entail of human sin, the gold thread of a divine, redeeming purpose runs through your life and mine, through this epoch and that, through good things and bad things, through frustration and defeat, through victory and conquest; and, in the end, God's purpose of bringing all men into unity with Himself will be done.

3. This brings us to our third point: that *a good story must have a satisfying end*. Have you noticed that, when some people read a novel, they have no patience to await its slow development, so they take a little peep at the end? The story seems to get into such an inextricable impasse that it looks as if things will never turn out properly, so some readers turn to the last chapter. Very well! Let us look at the last chapter in this tale of human life. We cannot see it except by faith, but the overwhelming testimony of those who have looked at the last page is very comforting, especially at this stage of events when we are downhearted and depressed.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: 'We see not yet all things subjected to Him . . . but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour.'<sup>1</sup> That is a peep at the last page. If you turn up St. Paul you will find this, 'All things work together for good to them that love God',<sup>2</sup> or this, 'He must reign until He hath put all His enemies under His feet'.<sup>3</sup> Or turn to St. John and get his glimpse at the last page, and he will show you in the last book of the Bible a picture of the Eternal City, with twelve gates and all the nations bringing their glory into it.

All the saints have been quite sure, by faith, that the end of the story will satisfy everybody. They do not believe that history, like a stream in the desert, will run out into meaninglessness, 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. Some speak of the 'second

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews ii. 8-9.    <sup>2</sup> Romans viii. 28.    <sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians xv. 25.

coming of Christ', others of the 'millennium', others of the 'consummation of the ages', and we will not inquire now what those phrases mean. But they all reveal the certainty of the saint that the end of the story will satisfy everybody, and that no man will be able to look back upon his life and say, 'I have been treated unjustly: I have been set a hopeless task: I have had too much pain, or too much sorrow: I was hopelessly frustrated: Life could not be anything but a farce to me: God is cruel: God is unjust: God is unkind'.

If there were time I should like to take you through some of the great hymns—for the hymn-book is, indeed, a treasury of devotion—and show you how the great hymn-writers peeped at the last page, and then wrote down what they had seen by faith.

Here I raise my Ebenezer;  
Hither by Thine help I'm come,  
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,  
Safely to arrive at home.

Few hymns are good poetry, but consider the optimism of this rhyme:

His love in times past forbids me to think  
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;  
While each Ebenezer I have in review,  
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.

And yet again, in better verse and triumphant faith:

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still  
Will lead me on  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
*The night is gone.*

They all believe that the night will go. In all Christian literature for two thousand years there is not one exception.

Life's story can contain dark chapters. The earthly life of Jesus contains a chapter full of sorrow and, apparently, full of frustration and defeat. He kneels in a Garden, the blood and sweat rolling down His face. Crowned only with thorns, He goes on to the Cross, bearing our sins. But this chapter about a lonely Man

dying in the dark is *the last chapter but one*. The last chapter is Easter morning, with the dawn breaking and birds singing and angels exulting and man rejoicing. The end of the tale that is told satisfies everybody.

Have you sometimes closed a novel and said to a friend who lent it to you, 'I wondered how on earth the author was going to work it out. What an amazing story! What an original plot!' I think many of us will be similarly surprised when the tale comes to an end, whether it be the tale of our own life or that of the world. Almost everybody's life contains dark and complicated chapters, full of sorrow and frustration and pain, but in the end we shall sigh with delighted surprise, as I have heard the Arabs sigh in the desert, at the incredible ending of the story. We shall say, in breathless wonder: 'It is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.'<sup>1</sup>

So, whether you think of life as the narrative of an individual or the story of a nation, or the history of the world, remember that there is a moral to this story, and it is this. Co-operate with God. Remember that there is a purpose in this story. It is the fulfilment of the plans of God. Remember that there is a satisfying ending to this story. It is the glory of God. And go out into the New Year with these fine words of Paul ringing in your mind: 'NO ONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL EVER BE DISAPPOINTED. NO ONE!'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxviii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Romans x. 11 (Moffatt's translation).

## INEVITABLE MYSTERY

THERE is a text in the Book of Job—the twenty-sixth chapter and fourteenth verse—which I should like you to have in your minds, if you will, as we think quite simply about the matter of mystery. 'These are but the fringes of His ways. How small a whisper do we hear of Him!'

That lovely poem, the Book of Job, the earliest of all the Bible writings, with its discussion of the age-long problem of suffering, is full of the most exquisite passages, and here is one of the gems. After Job has described the lovely things in nature, 'These', he says, 'are but the fringes of His ways. How small a whisper do we hear of Him!'

I don't know that I can find any figure which I can offer you which brings that thought of mystery before the mind with the clarity and beauty of that sentence of Job. I can only imagine that a person might land on the shore of a great continent for an hour or two, pick up some lovely shells on the beach, follow a little winding stream into the interior, and see, growing on the banks, lovely flowers, and be lured on and on by the thrill of a developing glen and a widening valley, and then, perhaps, only have time to make his way to one little hillock from whence he could look out over wider and inviting country before it was time to go back, take ship, and leave the remainder unexplored. 'These are but the fringes of His ways. How small a whisper do we hear of Him!'

Now, there are a great number of people who are troubled by the mystery of life, particularly in relation to religion. It is a real problem to them. They say, 'Well, of course, there may be a God, but life is all so mysterious. You can't really be sure.' When you talk to them about our Lord, they say, 'Yes, no doubt He was a wonderful Man, but I have never been able to make anything of the Divinity of Christ. His miracles puzzle me. The Bible is a



strange country with a different language and a different atmosphere from scientific Western civilization. It is all so mysterious.' And when you talk to them about the nature of man, that too is mystery. We cannot understand ourselves. Man's strange nature, his combination of God and animal, his queer, supernatural sense, that numinous awe that we once talked about together, that queer way he has of reacting to certain things like beauty, how mysterious a creature is man! And so many people, when they come up against that which is mysterious, turn back again. It is as though, to go back to the original figure, instead of wanting to go onward and forward and upward, lured and attracted by the mystery of existence and God and Christ and life, they are quite satisfied with pitching a little tent on the beach which encloses a square yard or two of sand. They can understand that. There is less mystery. They have shut it out and they settle down content.

Such an attitude may be partly due to the scientific atmosphere which our minds now breathe; the scientific age in which we live, in which, more and more, men are taught to depend on the senses. Science deals with the things you can measure; the things that you can weigh and count and see. You do your chemical experiment and every time you do it the same thing happens, and you put your little boundary wall round that which seems to be known and in that little area you feel at home. There is mystery beyond. All that is now so familiar was once hidden in the hills of mystery. But the average scientist is content to leave that. He has not got the instruments with which to deal with that, and so he settles down in the tent of that which can be tested and the rest he leaves on one side. And yet, men and women, some of the scientists who can see farthest, are more and more taking their colleagues by the hand—if I may still cling to the figure with which I started the sermon—and saying: 'Strike your tent and come up with me a little, and you won't just be happy to think that everything that is real can be weighed and measured and counted and seen and tested.'

I brought with me this afternoon that book of Jeans called *The Mysterious Universe*, thinking I might read a passage to you, but time forbids. At the end of his book Jeans discounts that so-called

scientific attitude and says that he feels, more and more, that the universe is the work of a great mathematician and runs up into a mystery to which mathematics supplies some kind of key. And he finishes the book really with a credo, his own confession of faith that that which is the true reality may be entirely spiritual, and that, at any rate, you cannot even make sense of the universe if you rule out the spiritual world which has its facts as well authenticated as has the physical world.

I don't know whether those who feel that there is security and safety in science, and that in religion the mystery of the unknown undermines even the certainty of the known, have realized that immediately you begin to ask questions in science you are met with evasive replies or an honest confession of ignorance. I am reminded of a tutor of my own college days whom we used to tease because he would sit in the lecture hall at his desk, and say to almost every question we asked: 'Well, we really don't know.'

I don't want you to think that is true only about religion, because if you say to the scientist, 'Do you mind telling me what electricity is?' he says, 'I don't know. Nobody knows'. If you say to the scientist, 'Do you mind telling me what caused life on this once red-hot planet?' he says, 'We really don't know.' If you say to the scientist, 'Do you mind explaining to me how that, given the animal creation, animals ever evolved into the self-conscious man,' the answer is, 'We don't know'. He may talk to you about the long centuries, as though time could turn the unconscious animal into the self-conscious man. No one knows how that mysterious thing called consciousness began. No one, watching from outside the earth the events happening on it, could have prophesied, from the data before him, the emergence of man. Indeed, I don't know any branch of any science in which it is not true to say that there is a tiny little area of the known and then there is a vast continent of the unknown. You can tie a doctor up in five minutes with questions. What is epilepsy? Nobody knows. What causes it? Nobody knows. What cures it? Nobody knows. And so with a dozen diseases. I hear that the question on which the Brains Trust privately spent the most time was the question sent up by a little

girl of eleven, who said: 'Will you, please, tell us why sugar is sweet?' I am only saying these things to suggest that we should not be put off from resting in religious reality and from making religious quest, by that vast hinterland of the mysterious which lies all around every tiny area of the known. The known is a tiny, tiny island in an immense sea of the mysterious and the unknown.

When you turn from science and talk to explorers who have been where no human foot has trodden before their own, do you not catch, as you read their books, that same strange sense of inevitable mystery? Read *South*, by Shackleton, or read that wonderful book of Cherry Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World*. Read how these men, as they trod through the icy wastes, had a most amazing, and sometimes terrifying, sense of the mystery of those silent, uninhabited wastes of untrodden snow. 'We dared not stop talking,' they tell us, 'we had to talk to one another. The veriest gossip would do, but if we kept silent we could not bear the mystery that bore down upon us in those unbearable silences.' Do you see what they are doing? They are putting up that little tent of conversation, putting a little wall, as it were, round the known and familiar and homely. 'Let's talk about your aunt at Finchley. Let's talk about keeping rabbits or poultry. Have you heard the yarn about the man who . . . ?' and so on. The mind clinging to the little area of the familiar and the known and the homely, because all around is the mysterious unknown.

When you turn to the artists, the musicians, and the poets, who, in a sense are the high priests of life, then the point becomes more and more obvious. Do you know this little poem of Ralph Hodgson?<sup>1</sup>

He came and took me by the hand  
Up to a red rose tree.  
He kept His meaning to Himself,  
But gave a rose to me:  
I did not ask Him to lay bare  
The mystery to me,  
Enough the rose was heaven to smell,  
And His own face to see.

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Hodgson, *Poems* (Macmillan & Co.).

Indeed, I think part of the explanation—if it is an explanation—of great poetry is that, because of the particular artistry in the use of words, the poet is taking us by the hand, saying to us, 'Now come away from that comfortable little patch you have made for yourself on the beach of life and follow this winding stream, and let us go up into the foothills', until he gets us as far as words can take us, and then he leaves go of our hand and we come back again, down to the old, familiar, homely things. But it is with an inexpressible awe in our hearts because we have been shown that beyond the familiar and known is the mysterious and the terribly beautiful which cannot be put into words. It is as much as you can do sometimes to bear the meaning of great poetry.

It seems to me as though, when the poet leaves go of your hand, the musician takes it and leads you farther because he can say more. What is violin music but the crying out of humanity in the wilderness of the Infinite with no language but a cry? What is it but an attempt to express the inexpressible! I remember hearing Kreisler do a wonderful thing. After a programme of classical music, in response to encore upon encore, he took his violin and without any music at all, he played what I still believe was music never written by anybody. I am not a musical person, but it seemed to me as though he was doing the very thing I have tried to describe; as though he said, 'If you do want more, you shall have it. Come away from the beach. You have landed there. You are content with your little tent and I have tried to interpret a few things to you, but if you want more, come along.' First you could hear the sounds of nature that are in a sense familiar—the wind in the trees and the songs of the birds and the running of a mountain brook down the hillside. You could hear the murmur of the wind growing in strength until it became a tremendous storm, sweeping through the forests, and you could hear the swish of the rain and the roar of the thunder, the lightning was flashing, the terrible forces of nature were unleashed. Then the storm died away again and the birds began to sing and the rain stopped. But when his listeners had been taken through that particular country that we can all bear because its music is familiar, then he went on and on

and on, until you almost rose up in your place in the concert hall and begged him to stop because you felt you were *overhearing* something which it is not lawful for man in the flesh to hear; as though you were listening to the angels round the throne of God, as though you were being carried up to worship before the throne of God, sharing the agony of a God broken-hearted over a world gone wrong. And that violin of Kreisler's sobbed and moaned and agonized and wailed, until you nearly said, 'For God's sake, stop! I can't bear any more.' At last he stopped. He could not play any more. Even he could not take us farther out into the waste of the universe where no device of man, no word or music, could imprison for us mystery overwhelming.

Now, men and women, if the scientist, longing to know, if the explorer, longing to see, and if the artist, longing to feel, all take you to the edge of utter mystery, is it surprising that religion, which longs to know and to see and to feel all in one, should have its frontiers in the realm of inevitable mystery?

The nature of God will be, of course, for ever beyond us. That ought not to need saying, except that man gets so conceited on his little wayside planet. How finely Cecil Day Lewis protests against such conceit in one of his poems:<sup>1</sup>

God is a proposition  
And we that prove Him are His priests, His chosen.  
From base hypothesis  
Of strata and wind, of stars and tides, watch me  
Construct His universe  
A working model of my majestic notions.  
A sum done in the head.  
Last week I measured the Light, His little finger,  
The rest is a matter of time.

When you think of the things I have spoken about, like music and poetry and the solitary wastes, and the questions the scientist never attempts to answer, what about the nature of the Creator of all these things? Is it strange we do not understand His being and His ways with us? And yet men are heard saying such little things.

<sup>1</sup> Cecil Day Lewis, *Collected Poems* (Hogarth Press).

'I don't understand Him and so I shan't love Him, and I shan't worship Him, and I shan't think about Him any more.' Isn't it childish, utterly silly? Why, the totality of all that is known, compared with the unknown, represents one pebble compared with all the beaches in the world. Here 'are only the fringes of His ways. How small a whisper do we hear of Him!'

Then think of the nature of Christ and the nature of man. All we know about colour is what we call the spectrum. The red and the orange and yellow and the green and the blue and the indigo and the violet—just the spectrum of colour. But we know from other devices that there are waves below the violet—the ultra-violet, and waves above the red—the infra-red, a range of waves comes to us that we cannot receive as colour because our little apparatus of sight is incompetent. Now, Jesus is the spectrum of God. Jesus is as much of the nature of God as our tiny, little natures can register and take in, but the nature of God goes on beyond either end of the spectrum, into infinitely mysterious realms where man has no power to penetrate. Or you could take your illustration from sound. The birds can hear sounds that we cannot hear at all. There can be sound waves in the air so fast that they are beyond the top note that the human ear can pick up, and so slow that they are below the bottom note that the ear can detect, and all music lies within a few octaves. That is all. Beyond that is utter mystery. Jesus is the octave of God. Just a few notes, true, beautiful, lovely notes, but beyond it all the utter mystery of God: as far beyond us as Beethoven's music would be beyond a man who could only hear six notes. 'These are but the fringes of His ways.'

I only want to get over to you one message. Don't be put off religion because of its mystery. Don't say, 'Well, I don't understand the strange ways of God to man, and I don't know why this and that should happen'. Of course you don't. Nor does anybody. That old professor I made fun of was quite right. 'We really don't know.' We hardly know anything. Let it suffice that we know enough to live by and what we do know is not illusion. We apprehend though we cannot comprehend.

There are two things about mystery that are of value, and the first is this: I think when we are at our best, mystery lures us on. Who could worship where all was understood? If God were so small that the mind of man could understand Him, He would be unworthy of our worship and incapable of achieving His purposes. And isn't it one of the sweetest things about being in love that the personality of the loved one is mysterious to the end? We know enough to make us happy, but a delightful mystery lies all around the area of the known, and we are lured on to make delicious discoveries. We know enough about God to love Him, but 'these are but the fringes of His ways'. A holy and lovely mystery lures us on.

Then I think mystery has this second value; it purifies motive. I wonder if you would take that thought away with you. It is mystery that calls out faith and hope and patience; and the counsel of God becomes more truly counsel when we follow it in faith and hope and patience, and not in sight. If mystery were banished from religion, motives would be less religious, because if mystery were stripped away, religion would be seen to pay. If you could see the whole nature of God's plans with man laid bare, and if by a miracle you could be given such a vast mind that you could see the whole scheme of God's purposes and understand them as something that has been completely explained, then you would no longer walk step by step in patience and hope and faith and trust. You would say, 'Well, I never dreamt that *that* was what He was after or else . . .' What? You would have followed anything that paid such a dividend as that. It seems to me that it is necessary that God should conceal His ways with us, or else He would lower in value our very motive for following His way. It is more valuable to the soul to walk along a road, the end of which is indiscernible, and when to walk at all is hard and apparently valueless, than to see the end and appraise the value so clearly that all the time the motive could not be other than self-interest.

So I hope, men and women, that so far from being put off by the mystery of religion and life, we shall be glad about it.

I love that story about Mrs. Einstein, wife of the scientist who discovered relativity and who was banished from Germany because

he was a Jew, even though he is one of the greatest brains in the world, perhaps the greatest brain since Newton. Somebody said to Mrs. Einstein, 'Do you know all about relativity?' And it is said that, with a smile, she replied, 'No, but I know my husband'. I love that. I like to imagine that they are very happy; that she rests her mind in her love for him, and that the mystery of his immense knowledge endears him to her even more than would be the case if she understood his theories; that his greatness gives her pride and the delicious sense of being loved by one so great.

Do you understand the ways of God to men? Ways that bewilder and confuse us and make us almost certain that religion not only does not pay, but is untrue, unreal, and irrelevant. Good people suffer agonies of body and mind. Crooks and rogues flourish. Behind many a façade of happiness is heartbreak and disillusionment. We cannot make sense of life. Violence and greed and cruel rapacity turn the whole world into a shambles. Young men of sound body and healthy mind, with high ideals of unselfish service, are killed in thousands. Imbeciles and incurables survive. Sleek complacent, well-fed, selfish women flop from one bridge-party to another, parasites of society, scum of a false civilization. The poor are bombed in their homes. The rich evacuate themselves to safety. An industrial system makes a few folk wealthy and a thousand a means to the end of the few. Yet the thousand are deep in sin. Many have no mind for a new world. They gamble and drink and lust and sweat in their slums. They don't even rise up and demand their own rights. Some rarely ask for anything more than 'the pictures' and the pubs, a holiday at Hampstead and a 'binge' at Christmas. Their days of outstanding happiness are blurred in their own fuddled memories by the fumes of beer. . . . And God seems to sit in heaven and wait and watch. . . . Oh! I know another side can be put, but what a world of evil this one sometimes looks, and how remote and futile religion often seems! How mysterious are life and destiny and man and God!

I do not understand God's ways, but I know God. For in Jesus is to be seen all of God that a human life can carry and reveal.



Mystery enfolds everything beyond that little area on the beach of history where He pitched His tent. The Word became flesh and *pitched His tent* among us.<sup>1</sup> Yes, all else is mystery and most of that too. 'I don't know much about relativity,' says Mrs. Einstein, 'but I know my husband.' I don't know much about God, but I know God in Jesus. I'm proud to be loved by One like this mysterious God, proud to share His life and to be of some little use as He works out His plans. In Jesus I can guess what those plans for a new world must be.

I do not ask what joys or woes time holds for me,  
I simply seek a love that goes out unto Thee.  
As surely as the river flows to meet the sea.

Or, if I may misquote another poet:

I do not ask *Thy* way to understand,  
My way to see,  
Better in darkness just to feel Thy hand  
And follow Thee.

Yes, men and women, I think that is true. Many of us during the last six years have learnt a lot about that darkness. Better the darkness and the mystery, so long as there is the feel of that pierced hand, and the obedience of our loyal hearts. 'I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out *into the darkness* and put thine hand into the hand of God. That shall be to thee better than light and safer than a known way."'

<sup>1</sup> John i. 14. That is what *tabernacled* or *dwelt* means.

# THE CITY TEMPLE

## ORDER OF WORSHIP

ORGAN PRELUDE. 'Cantilene' *Wm. Wolstenholme.*

(The Choir, robed, enters in procession, followed by the Minister.)

INTROIT (all standing) 908 (21).

'Lead me, Lord.' *S. S. Wesley.*

Soloist: Miss Miriam Benham, L.R.A.M.

SILENT ADORATION.

INVOCATION.

GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

'Almighty God, Father of all mercies,' etc.

HYMN 22. 'Almighty, invisible, God only wise'

'St. Denio' (M.H.B. 34). *Welsh Hymn Melody.*

HOLY SCRIPTURE. St. Mark vi. 17-32.

HYMN 59. 'Whom should we love like Thee?'

'St. Godric' *J. B. Dykes.*

READING. 'Leisure' *W. H. Davies.*

ANTHEM 902 (15).

'How lovely are Thy dwellings fair.' *Spohr.*

Soloist: Miss Bessie Lang, L.R.A.M.

A FELLOWSHIP OF SILENCE. PRAYERS.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Intoned).

OFFERTORY for the work and witness of the Church.

VOLUNTARY. Prelude on 'Southwell.'

*Charlton Palmer.*

PRAYER OF DEDICATION.

HYMN 406. 'O Lord, how happy should we be.'

'Innsbruck.' *German.*

SERMON.

The Minister.

Subject: 'Christianity and Leisure.'

(1) The Necessity of Leisure.

SILENCE.

HYMN 411.

'My heart is resting, O my God'

'Elim.'

*W. H. Callcott.*

BENEDICTION.

ORGAN POSTLUDE. 'Prelude and Fugue in C'

*Bach.**Organist: MR. MARTIN FEARN.*

The Services proceed without announcement. The Congregation rises with the Choir except for the Anthem. Silence during the voluntaries is requested in order that the spirit of worship may be maintained throughout. 'God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.'

## THE CITY TEMPLE AT WORSHIP

I WANT to celebrate the anniversary of my City Temple ministry by talking to you about our order of worship here.<sup>1</sup> Visitors must forgive this departure from the conventional sermon, but it seems to me very important that, occasionally, we should take time to consider our approach to God in such a way that subsequently our worship here may be richer and more fruitful. A good Roman Catholic can talk to you eloquently about the rich meanings of the Mass. A good Anglican knows his Prayer Book and can explain the order of worship in his church. I have been worshipping lately with the Quakers and they too can explain their particular form of worship. Free Church worship has a peculiar danger, the danger of slovenliness. The fact that no particular order of worship is demanded, that ceremonial is discouraged and ritual regarded with some suspicion, makes the risk of disorderliness greater. Freedom can become licence here as anywhere. I revel in the freedom, for by its means we can use every kind of approach to God. But freedom needs greater and more continuous care than set forms demand.

Let us not spend any time in cheap criticism of other forms of worship. That is negative and valueless bad taste. Let us say straight away what the aim of our service here this morning is: It is to bring every worshipper into vital touch with God. If that be achieved, God will do the rest. If that be missed, then the loveliest building, the most glorious singing, the most stately order of service, and the most wonderful preaching may only be forms of entertainment or instruction which could be had elsewhere. All these things should be avenues leading to God. They should not be termini having no further aim or end than themselves.

Our service here is open to the charge that it is individualistic,

<sup>1</sup> The order of service at the City Temple is printed on pp. 255-6.

but for years I have laboured, in consultation with others, to make it so beautiful and so satisfying that, whatever may be the mood in which a worshipper enters the church, some part of the service will alter his mood sufficiently to open his being to God. Many will slip into this church already in the mood to worship, but some will come very depressed. Others will come almost overburdened with grief and loneliness, with sin and worry. Some will even come in the mood of rebellion against God. They will feel that their souls are frozen within them, that the word 'God' has been emptied of meaning and that the joy of life is a legend. Even so, if a service is all that it ought to be, it will be powerful enough to change a mood. Even the gate slammed in God's face will move on its hinges and a way be opened up by which the worshipper finds his heart kindled within him and his soul seeking for the living God.

The task of a doctor with a patient is to open all the doors he can in the patient's spirit, mind, and body so that the healing forces of God can, with greater ease and power, sweep into that person's life and bring to him that health which is God's purpose. A similar kind of co-operation is attempted in a church service. All that is arranged and sung and said—indeed, the very architecture of the building and the kind of music that is played—are attempts to co-operate with God so that the personality of the worshipper shall be opened up to Him, in order that the power and glory of God can sweep into human lives and bring spiritual health and well-being. Remember that the word 'holy' and the word 'whole' and the word 'health' are all the same in origin. The service begins when you enter the church, and everything that happens from the first note of the organ to the last is intended to bring you into living touch with God.

We are very fortunate here in the loan of this beautiful building,<sup>1</sup> I will not stay to give you a lecture on ecclesiastical architecture but there is immense spiritual value for us in the fact that we are gathered in a place on the site of which worship has been offered to Christ for over a thousand years. Some of you can still see the

<sup>1</sup> St. Sepulchre's Church, Holborn Viaduct, London. See Preface.

little doorway which shows in the wall high up near the organ, through which the monk used to come from the monastery and, from the top of the screen, read the gospel to people who could not read for themselves. And all the frozen music of these lovely arches, and the glory of such stained-glass windows as the Germans have left to us, are trying to say to us, 'Pray'. It may be a superstition, but I don't reject the thought that the very walls, hard as they are, have received and can give out something of the redolence of piety which they have absorbed for so long. After all, even hard walls are etheric manifestations, and may be more sensitive to the spiritual happenings that go on within them than some materialists think.

Then the music. I think of the music as a kind of spinning of Christ's garment, for I think all beauty is the garment of God, and whoever, in faith, touches the hem of His garment finds healing. I am not here going to make any attempt at an estimate of the dedicated efforts of our choir and organist, though I am proud of both. I want you to think, however, of the music, so carefully prepared and so beautifully rendered, as an avenue. You are to pass through it. You are not to dwell in it. If you go home and only say of the music, 'How well the choir sang! How beautifully the organist played!' you may have missed that for which the music exists. Music, that strange voice of humanity crying out in the wilderness of the infinite, is a translation into sound of part of the loveliness of God, and you must love God as well as admire His garment.

As for the hymns, we deliberately try to choose those which will help all kinds of people, even the unmusical people. Sometimes we deliberately choose those that 'go with a swing' because some people are really spiritually helped by what they call 'a good sing'. Sometimes we choose hymns with tunes you don't know, partly that you may learn a new tune and partly that you may, for once, notice the words! For I am afraid it is true that 'a good sing' can be a spiritual anæsthetic and one is carried away so much by the lilt of the music that the tremendous things that are being said in the hymn are missed. We cannot, of course, exclude hymns that are

bad poetry. Very few hymns are good poetry. We cannot even exclude those which we cannot, word for word, believe. We must let some words be sung as aspiration, for that is the only way in which we can sincerely sing them at all. They represent a point at which we hope to arrive. But here again, the hymns are to be regarded as avenues, not termini. In brackets, let me say that, if you want any particular hymn on any particular occasion, you have only to send a postcard and we will do our best to serve you.

Now the lesson. The reading of the Scriptural lesson goes back to the days when people could not read at all. Initiated because they *could* not read, the practice is maintained because they *do* not read. It is very valuable, then, to continue the reading of the Word of God. In our Free Church worship we are not committed to any particular lesson, and, as I see it, the lesson provides the intellectual and inspirational background behind the chosen meditation of that particular act of worship.

Regular worshippers here know that, instead of a second lesson, I frequently read some poem or selection of prose. I have been pleasantly surprised that this practice has called forth no word of criticism. If the practice were criticized, I think I should have a ready answer. You don't object to the singing of a solo or anthem in church even if the words are unscriptural, so I see no reason why there should be an objection from broadminded people if the words, instead of being sung, are read to you. You will probably hear the words even better when they are read!

Then again, no intelligent view of inspiration supposes that only words within the covers of the Bible—which is itself a library containing every kind of literature—are truly inspired. Obviously a line had to be drawn somewhere. A selection of literature had to be completed and the canon or body of teaching closed. If this had not been done; if the practice by which the Bible was first put together had been continued so as to include inspired literature through the ages, the library would indeed have been vast. But in our England it would have included *some* passages from Milton, Shakespeare, Donne, George Herbert, Pope, Gray, Goldsmith, Wordsworth, Lamb, Tennyson, Browning, Kipling, and so on to

modern poets like Masfield, de la Mare, Thompson, and Brooke, and a similar list of prose writers. No one could possibly maintain that there is more inspiration in Leviticus, a book of directions for Jewish priests, than in some of Browning's poems; or that a modern congregation would be more inspired by a chapter from the Book of Esther—a Biblical book in which the name of God does not occur once—than in a short extract from *In Memoriam*. I don't think anybody has ever said to me, 'That was a grand passage you read from the Bible as a lesson', but people have often written and spoken to me about a poem read from the pulpit. It is unfamiliar. It strikes through to our minds and hearts and souls while the more familiar language of the Bible runs off our hearts, hardened by familiarity against its message. I know that there is much more to be said about inspiration than I have hinted here. There is a difference in quality between a passage written with the motive of expressing thought about God or God's message to His people, and a passage motivated by the desire to express a beautiful thought. But, for the reasons given, the practice, I think, is defensible.

I shall say little this morning about the place of the sermon in the order of worship because what ought to be said about a sermon is better said to ministers than their victims. One or two considerations, however, might be offered. A sermon, like every other part of the service, should leave the worshipper, inwardly, at any rate, on his knees, contemplating God or Jesus and dedicating himself in the divine strength to deeper discipleship. If a sermon merely makes the hearer say, 'That was a poor sermon', or 'That was a good sermon', if the sermon is merely a brilliant exposition of the background of Isaiah's day, or if it is a comment on the modern situation without adequate reference to the purposes of God, then, however clever or eloquent, it is bad preaching. It ought to be simple, direct, convincing. It ought sometimes to challenge and sometimes to comfort; sometimes to break down and sometimes to build up. But whether it is what we call topical—that is, referring to some happenings of the time; or whether it is expository, working out for modern hearers some message from Holy



Scripture; whether it is psychological, trying to interpret men to themselves; whether it is social in its implications, stirring men to make a new world; or whether it is evangelical, expressing the endless offer of Christ to change men's lives; the goal of the sermon is the glory of God, how God is working out His purposes, how His truth, perceived and realized by the mind and accepted by the heart, can empower the will, change the direction of the life, bring comfort and solace, and so on. People ought to feel that there is no trouble into which they can ever get but there is a word of God that can come to them and bring them through that experience with victory, that God is their unfailing Friend, that He is interested in the details of the life of the lowliest worshipper, and that the soul's communion with God and utter surrender to Him is the goal of all human striving. If the sermon does that, it doesn't matter whether the preacher has a text or a pretext, whether what he says is forgotten or remembered. Indeed, perhaps the ideal service would be one in which the heart was left, as it were, alone—even in a large congregation—with God, the soul discovering that the whole service was relevant to the difficult business of his life and that the divine power released through it could send him out to live in a new world of purpose, beauty, meaning, and power. No service succeeds if it leaves the worshipper feeling that religion is something remote from life. Real religion is relevant to everything we do and say and think.

I once had a most striking illustration of this in talking to a man who is now in the Methodist ministry. When he was a young student, I asked him where he got the feeling that he ought to be a preacher. He answered: 'It was a sermon preached when I was a schoolboy at Kingswood School.' I was a little surprised, because schoolboys are not supposed to take much notice of sermons. They form the hardest congregation in the world from the preacher's point of view, for nobody wants to be there, everybody is praying it will be over quickly, and everybody is hoping that the preacher will make a fool of himself. I asked this youth who the preacher was. He said: 'I don't remember.' I asked him what the sermon was about. He said: 'I don't remember.' But that service had

become an avenue and that sermon had become a pointed message, and God had got through to that boy's life, and to-day, in the best sense of the word, he is a very successful minister.

Let me say one word about ritual acts. In our service here they are very simple. Their justification is that for some who are influenced by the things seen, they make God real. In this lovely old Anglican Church there is a crucifix on the altar, and, during the service, every time I pass it, I turn towards it. I cannot pass the holiest symbol in the world as if it were of no greater significance than a lamp-post, and when a reverence is made towards it, it is to remind ourselves of all that it means. I am so glad it is there. I hope there will be one in the new City Temple and that it will be central as it is here, so that, however badly one preaches, the central symbol which naturally attracts the eyes of all worshippers will not be a man preaching, but a Christ redeeming, a reminder of His uttermost love for all men. Rome has no monopoly of the Cross. It belongs to all.

One of my friends says—and he is a most stalwart Free Churchman—that the peak of the service for him is my simple act of kneeling at the altar before the Benediction. I do that symbolically to ask God's forgiveness for anything in the service that has been untrue or unworthy, and there I offer, as your representative, the whole service to God as an act of worship and adoration. I am not there, of course, as Leslie Weatherhead. I am there as your chosen representative. I am you, offering your worship and all your powers to God. One dear soul did criticize this, and, when I made the above explanation, she said: 'Well, you could offer it to God from your pew.' Knowing that she had been a Baptist, and knowing her well enough to tease her, I was able to say to her that she might have plunged herself beneath the baptismal waters in her own bathroom and said the same prayers there. Instead of that, she went to church, and with much ritual and ceremony and prayer, was immersed beneath the water by a minister. She was broadminded enough to see that her act in being baptized was a piece of ritual, very solemn and very full of beauty, expressing by a physical act and in a manner seen by others, the dedication of her

whole being, body, mind, and spirit, to the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit of God. No one need think I am going to Rome, but if there are any ways I can think of and approve, which, for anyone, would enrich the service, and give it yet deeper spiritual meaning and significance, and bring God to the starving hearts of men, through prayers offered, hymns sung, music listened to, sermons preached, acts performed, beautiful architecture, lovely flowers, and stained-glass windows, I hereby put it on record that I would do anything to attain that end. The drawing near of a soul to God is so important that I want to use any means, however criticized, to accomplish that goal, for that is why we come to church.

Similarly, the blessing of the offertory and the prayer of dedication turn the act of collecting money into an act of worship. To give our money to the cause of God is only a way of translating our love into practical service. No sincere man can worship God and believe in God without translating that love into means whereby God's work can be carried on, and any one who believes that the church is doing as useful work in the community as a picture theatre will at least give to the work of God that which he would have to give for a seat at 'the pictures' or the theatre. And when that offering is brought up to the altar, the symbolism means, not that you are dedicating a shilling or two. Money is power. You are giving that power to God for Him to use. But more, far, far more than that. The money you give should be a symbol of the dedication of *all* your powers to God for His service and the extension of His Kingdom in the world. The prayer offered is a prayer that our sincerity may be so real as to make the act of offering money symbolic of the dedication of our whole being. Some people imagine that the collecting of money in the service degrades it. As I watch the stewards coming up the aisle past the kneeling choir, I often feel that that act of dedication is the climax of the service. It could be so if properly understood and interpreted.

I have left the matter of the prayers until last, because they are the most important. We have here people of every denomination

and of none. Some people say to me: 'I love the Collects of the Anglican Church.' So do I. That is why we often use them. Others say: 'I love the silence of the Quakers.' So do I. That is why there is a space of silence three times in every service. Others tell me: 'I like the extempore prayers of the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists.' We frequently pray in that way. We also have 'guided prayer', in which you are asked to pray for this or that cause, this or that person. We have responsive prayers. We have liturgical prayers. Many of the prayers offered are my own, but they are generally carefully prepared first, because a completely extempore prayer tends to be expressed in the same phrases Sunday after Sunday, and when it is offered, inevitably part of the energy of the mind of the minister is used up in making English sentences. If the prayer is prepared beforehand, all that energy can be used in an act of worship when the prayer is offered. At our morning services we especially think of the King, the State, civic causes and world-wide issues and problems. At our second service, in afternoon or evening, we rather have 'family prayers' and we remember those whom we know and love and we make special intercession for those near to us who are ill.

This, of course, is not the time to open up the problems which prayer presents, but to make prayer in church more attractive I would like to say three things:

1. A man says: 'I can pray alone. I don't need to come to church to pray.' True. But here is not only a time and place and an atmosphere, but I feel, for myself, that the prayer rising from those all around us offers us wings on which our own prayers may more readily mount to God. For a lonely individual, then, to whom the heavens are as brass, the fact of others praying round him can make God more real to him and perceptibly closer to him.

2. A man can say: 'When you pray for the soldiers, sailors, and airmen, for instance, does it really help them? I can't see how it can make any difference to vast armies of men.' Let two brief answers be made. (a) Think not of a vast number of men, but think of an individual, a soldier, a sailor, or an airman whom you

know personally and especially one whom you love dearly, and believe that the prayers of the congregation are indeed helping him. But (b) do not dismiss prayer for a great number of people as absurd. To say, 'Lord, bless China', savours of unreality to me. But I wonder what Stalin would say to a heroic defender of Stalingrad if he suddenly said, 'I can't see that my bit of service counts. I am dropping out'. When you pray, you are adding your prayers to the mass of prayer going up all over the world, prayer for a righteous, just, and lasting peace and for the enduring liberty of all peoples. In so praying you are fighting for the cause just as truly, and, if we could see into the unseen, perhaps even more effectively, than the brave men in Stalingrad to-day. Mary Queen of Scots said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than all the armies in Europe. Hitler might well fear the united prayers of the Church of Christ.

3. A man may say: 'I can't understand how it can help a sick person when we pray in church.' We have discussed this before and must do so again, but, in a sentence or two, I believe that it works out in this way. Prayer doesn't 'cure' any more than the doctor 'cures'. We have said already that the doctor opens every door he can for the healing power of God, but there is a door which he normally does not open. He does not normally think of it as his business. It is the door of the spirit. He opens doors through which God comes in power and healing force to the body and even the mind of a patient, but I am sure that God's ordained way of co-operation with man includes also a spiritual co-operation. Prayer does not overcome a divine reluctance to help us. Prayer takes hold of the divine willingness to help us, and co-operates accordingly. I think the prayers of devout people do for the soul of the patient what the doctor's treatment and the nurse's skill do for his body. I always think of prayer as a way of co-operating with God. We are beginning to learn the immense importance of the mental and spiritual powers within mankind. A buoyant soul, a courageous attitude to life, a belief in recovery, a stronger grasp on health, a radiant hope, are factors of immense importance in recovery. Supposing prayer calls them into being, as I

believe it does, and suppose it can do so via the unconscious part of a patient's mind, then the calling into being of such things as hope, courage, optimism, and serenity, might well be the deciding factors which determine the recovery of the patient. There is much more in it than that.<sup>1</sup> I know that God will not allow prayer to save us the trouble of medical research and skill, but it would be as absurd to neglect so long established a practice as prayer for the sick as it would be to take no medical means to help recovery. 'Drugs and no prayer', said Sir Oliver Lodge, 'may be almost as foolish as prayer and no drugs.'

When you come to church to worship—preferably having prayed beforehand—try to bring something with you. You are sure to have a prayer for yourself that you seek to offer. You are sure to have a prayer for at least one other whom you love, and who, maybe, is far away. Try to realize, as you come, your oneness with the whole congregation in love, so that we become a united company through which God can work, both individually and corporatively, to do in us, through us, and for us, His blessed will. So here, in the heart of London, we can make a contribution not only to the war effort, but to all the causes that are dear to God's heart; so that all those things may flourish that are precious to God. Bring with you a little stone of faith and love and worship, and lay it down reverently and quietly as your contribution to the service. You will help to make a road along which Christ's feet shall pass, bringing pardon and comfort, strength and blessing to us all.

Lord, come away;  
Why dost Thou stay?  
Thy road is ready, and Thy paths, made straight,  
With longing expectation wait.  
The consecration of Thy beauteous feet.

<sup>1</sup> This is dealt with in the chapter, 'Healing through Prayer', in my book, *The Eternal Voice*, p. 205 (Student Christian Movement).

## THE CITY TEMPLE OF TO-MORROW

I SHALL have to ask visitors present this morning to forgive me if, instead of the usual sermon, I speak to City Templars about our dreams for the future. It is the Anniversary of my coming to you as minister of the City Temple. We have passed together through strange and terrible times and will not, this morning, look back upon them, but rather look forward and share together a vision of the City Temple of the future.

After all, you are entitled to hear what is in the minds of some of us. We ask for your prayers and your loyal service and your unstinted giving, and we have all three. You have the right to say to us, 'Can you not take us into your confidence and tell us a little more exactly what it is you hope to do?' Let me make it clear that I am not now speaking in the name of the officers of the church or the members. I am simply telling you what my own dreams are about the future.

First, as to the building. I want it to be a symbol in stone of the worship of God: a cathedral which is a symbol of what I hope will soon be a fact, the union of all Nonconformist denominations into a United Free Church of England. We must remember, as we build, that we are not building for to-day or to-morrow, but for centuries ahead. If we build worthily, then Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and members of all the non-Anglican and non-Roman denominations will feel that their highest ideas of worship find embodiment in the new City Temple. It must be majestic and dignified. It must be the kind of building that compels worship. By its very architecture it must induce that sense of numinous awe which is one of the means through which the august presence of God is mediated to men and women.

If I get my own way—and I have had it for many years!—we

shall not have the pulpit in the middle of the church. I have no desire merely to be new-fangled or to copy any other denomination, but, to my mind, the symbolism of that is all wrong. It makes the central object, which naturally holds the gaze of the congregation, a man preaching. Now, the important place of preaching can equally be emphasized by having the pulpit at the side. I want to have a Holy Table with a large crucifix on it or above it, so that the gaze of the congregation is naturally held by the most important symbol in Christianity, the redemption of the world which God accomplished through the death of His Son and the offer of the unending love of God. So let us have a lovely stained-glass window—which we will have given to us!—a crucifix in the centre of the Table, and on the Table an open Bible, symbolizing the offer of God's Word and the proclamation of His truth. Then however badly one preaches the congregation cannot miss a blessing, since, in the various periods of silence which we always include, they will have contemplated the greatest fact in the world, the Cross of Christ. Don't let any narrow and intolerant Nonconformity let you imagine that the Roman and Anglican Churches have possessive rights in the symbol of our most holy faith, or that, in placing it in a central position in our new church, we are surrendering our Free Church principles. The Cross belongs to everybody and at its foot all men are one.

I want the building to be always open, so that the crowds of busy people surging past, and living for the most part strained and hectic lives, can come in at any time and find healing of mind and spirit in its quiet and beauty. It always seems an outrage to me that so many Free Churches, on which thousands of pounds have been spent, are only open for three hours a week.

I want to have the premises always open for another reason—so that we can give people a cup of tea in a rest-room provided for the purpose. That may sound like coming down from the sublime to the simple, but one does not forget the value Jesus set on a cup of cold water. In Palestine in His day that was of great refreshment. It was a hot country and water often had to be carried for miles. Its equivalent in a cold country amongst us in the West is a cup of



tea. I want people to come in and find worship, fellowship, and refreshment. If I dare, I would say, 'at any time of day or night', so that in this great city the Temple doors would never seem shut to any lonely, grieving, distressed person.

I must not stay to deal fully with the accommodation we ought to have. I want somebody to give us a very beautiful Children's Church. We can provide the staff and do the work. I want the children of the congregation to come with their parents to church, and then to be deflected to the Children's Church, where a service will be held which perfectly meets their need and in which they take definite part. I want them from their earliest years to associate beauty and good music and happiness with religion and God. I don't want them to have the boredom of being dragged by their parents to endure a long service, most of which they cannot understand. I want their lovely little minds to open to the beauty of God as naturally as flowers open in the sunshine. The Children's Church I hope will also be used during the week for meetings for prayer and quiet worship.

If I deal with our dozen organizations at this length, you will be here till the middle of the afternoon, but we have every intention of providing adequate accommodation for all our organizations. We may anticipate that the Friday Fellowship will increase in numbers to the three to four hundred we had before the war. Ideally, each group should have a quiet spot for discussion. The Samaritan League and Women's League of Service must be given more cupboard accommodation and be enabled more adequately to carry out their great ministry to the poor. There must be room for our Women's Meeting which has been carried on heroically on Monday afternoons under difficult conditions. Perhaps the same room would do on Tuesday nights for the Social Circle, which has lessened the loneliness of life to many Londoners. I want us to have the Literary Society again, but I want the programme to be not merely entertaining, but to offer serious lectures on theology, economics, and psychology, so that keen religious people can be intellectually prepared in the great task of building the new world

and be enabled to fit practical religious living into an instructed mental fabric. Missionary work, too, must extend on the intellectual side. We cannot adequately love the Indian, the African, the Chinese, and so on, unless we understand the problems that are being faced in those countries, and I want us to link up more personally with missionaries on the field so that our prayer is more pointed. In regard to the Psychological Clinic, I had six doctors working with me before the war. At the present moment there is a waiting list which would fill the time of twice that number, and I believe the work of the Church of the future will more and more lie in dealing with the individual sick soul. We shall not be overlapping on Harley Street, because what we shall offer will not be merely the technical analytical work which is so important, but a synthesis on Christian lines. The need for such a synthesis is made clear to me almost every day. Here is a quotation from the letter of a patient received recently. She says:

'As the result of psycho-analysis I am able to see just what has caused me to feel as I do and to get into the mess I am in, but I am unable to get a real grip on life, or to feel that I am really making headway in overcoming my trouble. . . . The psychiatrist tells me that I must take the right attitude to life. . . . This is all clear to me and I understand it, but to do it practically is so hard. I should like your help as to what to do. I want to find the Christian way out of my problem which I believe to be all important.'

This is the cry of hundreds of people. It is very important to find out that one has been travelling along the wrong road, but unless one can find the right one, one can hardly have found the maximum help. I shall need the help of a number of doctors who have the three important qualifications which all those helping me have had—namely (in order of importance), (1) a vital, infectious Christian experience of God, (2) a psychological qualification, (3) a medical qualification. Then our Church can carry on the healing work which the Church has always been concerned about, but carry it on in full harmony and in co-operation with the valuable scientific methods of healing men and women which pertain in secular life. Our ladies who, through their Working Guild,

have done such excellent work, must also have adequate accommodation. I don't want to pass over any of the work that is being done. The whole building must say to the outsider: 'Welcome! We have something here that can enrich your life and help you to live victoriously, radiantly, and triumphantly.'

I have not forgotten the music. It will be in Mr. Martin Fearn's capable hands, and I hope God spares him until my day, at any rate, is over, because he is the ideal director of the music of a great church. We must have accommodation for a choir four times as big and as fine in spirit as this is, and I should like to introduce more orchestral work, so that the great musical compositions can be more adequately offered to those who, like myself, find so much inspiration in the ministry of sacred music.

You, my dear friends, must carry in your face and in your manner the kind of welcome that will go with the new church! You must make people feel: 'Now, these folk have got something and it is something I want.' Don't be dismayed by the criticisms of the world outside. The very hostility of the world is one of the greatest grounds of hope that I have. It would be dreadful if the world passed the Church by as irrelevant. Criticism, in a way, is a kind of negative tribute. Men don't criticize the public-houses and say, 'Isn't it sad, they're not nearly so full as they used to be?' The impatience of the world with the Church is a tribute to its importance. It means that the world *expects* the Church to succeed and feels that there is a job for the Church to do that is not being done. The world is hostile to the Church because it is angry that there should be such a need and that it should not be met. In the name of God, in the City of London, we will meet it.

I believe that the Free Churches will have a special opportunity and I love the word 'free'. We are free to include that which is helpful from every denomination. We can have the solemnity and dignity of the Roman Catholic Mass without bowing the knee to any infallible Pope. My Anglican friends will forgive me if I say that we can have the reverence and beauty of the Anglican prayers without being imprisoned in a tradition which compels their repetition every Sunday, without signing on the dotted line

concerning outworn creeds and articles. We don't have to swear allegiance to a bishop or even a king. Parliament has no control over the way we say our prayers, and I think there will be an immense opportunity for a church that can offer services that are satisfying and yet a church unhampered by the dead hand of the past.

Such an opportunity is hinted at in the very criticisms that were levelled against the Church in a recent popular magazine. The writer said: 'There is no fellowship in the Church. You don't get to know anyone even after years of attendance.' I wish he had been present last Friday night, when there was a fellowship of a very high intellectual and spiritual order, with goodwill, laughter, fun, prayer, and devotion for two and a half hours. The writer went on to say: 'There is no instruction given in church. The sermon varies between a harmless homily and an indefinite essay.' Well, this does, but most of them don't! 'Propaganda', says the writer of the article, 'is a lost art. Not even the subject of the sermon is announced.' We print it every week and publish a sermon every month in *The City Temple Tidings* which has a circulation of 5,000. Finally, he says: 'There is nothing to attract young people.' I don't quite know what he means by that. If he means that the Church should run billiards clubs, whist drives, and dances, or organizations which, if I may use the phrase, are no part of the living organism of the Church, but are tied on with string, then I hope we shall never descend to them. They are alleged to lure young people on to the premises in the hope that they will join the Church. My experience is that they rarely do, and in the meantime one has lowered the whole ideal of the dignity of Church membership. Some who clamour, for example, for a dramatic club, only want a room rent free where they can indulge in their particular hobby. Why the Church should offer them premises and pay their electric light bill, I don't know, and I cannot find the place in the New Testament where Jesus set out to 'attract young people' by such means. We have a dramatic club at the Temple, but, like the Social Circle, it is an expression of

good-fellowship offered by those whose first interest is religion, not drama or entertainment. No one, at the City Temple, is allowed to hold office in any organization connected with it, unless he or she is a member of the church, publicly received at a Communion Service. There is no exception to this rule. There is all the difference in the world between an organization which is an expression of the fellowship of the Church—the Church being understood as the fellowship of those who have enthroned Jesus as Lord of their lives—and the organization that tries to make the way of Christ easy and attractive. My experience is that the best young people are much more attracted by being offered a new way of life and a means of serving others at cost to themselves. If young people only want to enjoy themselves on church premises we are not interested. If they want to find a new and deeper meaning in life and follow Christ's way, we hold out both hands in invitation. We shall never win the youth of this country by making the threshold low and by making it appear as though there is very little difference between the Church and a cheap club.

I want us in the new City Temple to begin with the child. After the parents have brought him for baptism, we should never let go of that family. I want the baby's name on a Cradle Roll. I want the family regularly visited. I want volunteers to look after the baby while the parents come to church, so that we don't lose them in those critical years when the father does not like to leave the mother and the mother does not like to leave the father, so that the coming of the child takes his parents away from the life of the Church. It is sad that, in many little families, one of God's loveliest gifts becomes the means of separating the Giver from those who receive His gift.

Then I want a ministerial colleague who is a specialist in young people's work. He would look after the boys and girls clubs that I would like to have—Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Young People's Fellowships and so on. I want a Hospitality Club, so that, when lonely people come to church on Sunday morning, I can tell them that Mr. and Mrs. Jones are expecting them to lunch. I won't

press this on you in rationing time, but Sunday in a great city can be a frightfully lonely time for young people, and I know from my own earlier experience of life in London what it means to be invited on a Sunday into a good Christian home where there is fun and fellowship and food. I shall also want people to join a Look-Out Committee. A member of that committee sitting in any particular pew will get the name and address of any stranger sitting in any of the three pews in front of him, and he will be pledged to win that stranger to the City Temple unless he belongs to some other Church. There won't be any more coming Sunday after Sunday and stealing out without being invited to closer fellowship.

I shall resume those happy Social Hours we used to have after the Sunday evening service. You will remember that in the old City Temple we gathered in that subterranean hall—three or four hundred of us—and had music and coffee and family prayers. Jumping off the platform one Sunday night, I spoke to a girl who looked a bit lonely, and she said something like this: 'I came to London last Tuesday for the first time. My parents were very worried about my coming to this wicked city. When I came here to-night I didn't know a soul in London, but already three people have invited me to their homes and two to meetings during the week.' That girl was won into the fellowship of the Church. Supposing she had hit on a cocktail party or got into the company of unscrupulous people! Her very loneliness would have led her to cling to them and her life might have been led in unhappy and unfruitful ways. As it was, the prayers of her parents were answered and she herself began a new life.

If you say to me, 'What is the whole purpose of the new City Temple?' I can answer you in one sentence. It is to offer Christ to men and women. First and last, centrally and most importantly, the Church exists to offer Christ to men and women. A ministerial friend of mine once related a remarkable experience. In the great city where his church stands was a lonely man, a journalist, in pessimism and despair so great that he had purchased poison at the chemist's and was on his way to find a suitable spot in which to

take it. Seeing the crowd outside my friend's church, his journalistic impulse got the better of him and he followed the crowd into the church. As a result he came out, threw the poison down the drain, sought out the minister, and began a new life. If that man that morning had hit on people who did not believe in God, he would have taken his own life.

In this great big London of ours there are thousands of people who are unhappy, sad, burdened, repressed, inhibited, bewildered, and muddled. They cannot see beauty or meaning or joy in life at all. We have something to offer that can end their loneliness, lighten their burdens and transform their lives.

Let us without delay get into training so that we may be ready for that great day when, in more adequate premises even than this lovely old church, we can do the work which, for three hundred years, the City Temple in London has been pledged to do. I feel that a reaction is coming against irreligion. People are reading religious books, listening on the wireless to religious talks. Many are shy of the Churches and don't think much of parsons, but life without God just doesn't seem to make sense. Indeed, irreligion means lowered morale, hindered reform, disintegrated lives, divisive cliques. Irreligion has brought cynicism into literature. I think it is even true to say that it has brought jazz into music. It lowers moral standards. It undercuts the stability of our national life. Do believe that there is a great chance for a Free Church, not bound to formalism, not tied up so that it cannot meet the needs of a new age, but a living Church with three hundred years of tradition behind it, but nothing in its past which holds it back from meeting modern and future needs.

What a wonderful thing it will be for us to serve the new age by offering in this city all the beauty and joy and meaningfulness of life with Christ at its centre! What a bleak outlook it would be without God! Think of it!—No God, no immortality, no purpose in life, no moral values. Have a good time while you can! Be a 'bright young thing' while it is possible, and, when age makes it impossible, well, just escape as often as you can. Alcohol can help for an hour or two. Pleasure and fun make a night endurable

though despair cometh in the morning. . . . No! what a glorious thing it is we can offer! God, Christ, new life, good fellowship, goodwill, good humour, service to the community which is the greatest tonic the soul ever takes itself, and, running through everything, the worship of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. I believe we are stepping out into a future of tremendous hope and possibility, and I call upon you to help me to build, not only in stone, but in more living things, by prayer and dedication and love and adventure, the City Temple of to-morrow.



## AN ORDINATION CHARGE

*Given to the Rev. Ronald Ward, B.D., on the occasion of his  
ordination at St. Sepulchre's Church on Wednesday, October 20th,  
1943.<sup>1</sup>*

THIS is a day, Ronald, of solemn congratulation to you. I shall compress what I want to say to you now into a short time because this church is not blacked out and darkness will soon be upon us. Fortunately, you and I have talked so frequently about the great work to which you have just been ordained, that you know already what my ideals for you are, and I will only seek now to remind you of three things of the very greatest importance—one in your private life, one in your pastoral work, and one in your preaching ministry. I shall say nothing about the opportunities a chaplaincy will offer to you, if it comes your way, because that has already been dealt with by Dr. Berry.

1. In regard to your private life, I would remind you that there is one demand of primary importance. So important is it that the value of all the other work you will ever be called upon to do depends upon its reality and sincerity. I mean the absolute necessity of devotional discipline. Again and again, in the work of the ministry, a work which is not immediately supervised and which depends so much on one's own self-discipline, men allow themselves to get slack and lazy. This is particularly true at the close of a college course which itself follows a business career. Men in business have to rise at a certain time. They must be at their work

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Ronald Ward, B.D., now a Chaplain to the Forces with the Central Mediterranean Force, entered the Christian Ministry from the City Temple, where he exerted a splendid influence, especially in the Friday Fellowship. He is probably the only minister ever ordained in an Anglican Church to the Congregational Ministry.

by a certain time. For long years their work is usually supervised by another, and slackness is punished by a failure to get on or even by dismissal. In the work of the ministry it is possible to have breakfast at nine o'clock, to read the paper and smoke a pipe, to write a few letters and go out for a walk and find that the morning has gone. Punishment follows, of course. The awful punishment of self-despising and perhaps a life-long limitation of one's ministry, and, if one is not insensitive, the inward knowledge of the censure of God. But a young man who has been under the restraint and discipline of others at business and college for many years, suddenly finds that oversight has vanished in a night and he is free to determine how many hours he works and what work he does in them. In this there is real peril.

Let me pass on to you the message of a very dear friend of mine. He is dead now, but his ministry was an enriching experience for all who came under it. Let me summarize something I once heard him say: By nine o'clock a man ought to be in his study ready for hard work; the discipline of prayer and thought and hard reading. If he is in danger of slacking, let him remember that he is in his comfortable study by the goodwill of his own people. He really has a contract with them. They on their part are perfectly willing that he shall live in comparative freedom from financial anxiety and in a degree of comfort far greater than many of them enjoy, while they are working, often for poor wages, in factories, business warehouses, and offices. But the bargain lies here: Let the minister live so near to God that when they are in 'trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity', he shall be a tender physician of the soul, ready, willing, and able to help them, and that when they turn out at the hours of worship, he shall be able to offer them the real Bread of life, or, to change the figure, having climbed the mountains while they were working, he shall be able to come down to them from the hilltops and speak to them on Sunday mornings and evenings of what he saw of vision and beauty and wide horizons on the mount of God. If, through slackness or laziness, through being busy with the wrong things; if, having spent his time with trifles, he is unprepared to give them

that which has cost him something in his own quest, he is breaking the contract. Laziness is treachery to the cause of the kingdom, and the misuse of time is disloyalty to the King. There should not be any of our people who can say, 'I work harder for things material than my minister does for things that are spiritual'. The discipline imposed on those to whom we speak by the conditions under which they work should be less severe than the discipline a young minister imposes on himself for love of his people and love of his Lord.

At the same time, do watch wisely the matter of physical health. I speak as an older man who allowed the requirements of brother body to be overlooked. I can see things more clearly now and would like to help you. One thing is certain, that no conscientious minister can ever get through all the things there are to do. He can never sit down at the end of a day, as I suppose some happily can, and say, 'My work is finished'. There is always more that might be done—books to be read, letters to be written, people in trouble waiting to be seen, preparation of sermons and addresses that could be more complete, committees that demand attendance, organizations requiring one's presence, sick to be visited, prayers to be said. Yet to let physical fitness go, means doing less work in the end, and, while our work is the most glorious task in the world, it can become a very heavy burden to a man physically over-tired or nervously exhausted. Preaching, to mention only one of our tasks, but one of the most important, demands the maximum physical fitness of which we are capable. I remember that when I was at college a greatly loved professor used to say: 'To maintain physical health is a spiritual duty, and remember especially that you have no right to behave on Saturday in a way which lowers your physical fitness for the tasks of Sunday.'

In speaking of your private life, I would underline the importance of being busy with the important things. A minister, I may as well explain, must be a good preacher and attract people to come to church. He must be an assiduous visitor. It is intolerable that people should be overlooked just because they are ill or old. He must have a head for business. The finances of a church can be

very complicated, and a minister, presiding at the finance committee, must be able to understand the figures. What is more, he must spend and be spent in raising money. After all, much of it represents his own salary. He must keep in touch with civic affairs in the town where his church is, for he must be awake to local evils and sympathetic with the good work being done. He ought to be a trained psychologist. After all he who deals with personality-problems both in pulpit and in private, should understand how the mind works. Child-psychology should be a field in which he is at home, for his work in the Sunday School and amongst Boy Scouts and Girl Guides makes this essential. Since there is to-day so much emphasis on the 'Social Implications of the Gospel', he ought to be well up in all movements for social improvement, understand the philosophy of Karl Marx and the details of the Beveridge Plan and the history of every movement in between. Then a minister must be widely read. The scholarly books on theology must be mastered as they are published, but his reading must not be narrowed down to that. Astronomy and biology, essays, biography, and poetry must not be missed, and of course people often discuss a modern novel. How can a minister understand his people if he doesn't read what they read? Organizing ability, of course is necessary, and efficiency in running fellowship-groups (which require questions carefully prepared beforehand) boys' and girls' clubs, institutions, and guilds. Keeping in touch with them is important. No young man should enter the ministry who is not a good open-air preacher. It is useful if he can play the piano! Having more time than the layman (who has most evenings and all Saturday and Sunday) the minister must be much alone for quiet meditation and prayer. In view of this I think you must demand from your people the right to decide what you do and what you do not do! Don't be upset if people criticize you for what you have or have not done. It is better to expect criticism, for it will surely come, whatever you do. If your church is full, then it is obvious evidence that you 'play to the gallery' or you are a 'popular preacher'. (This is meant as a damning indictment, though of course an unpopular preacher is criticized even more.)

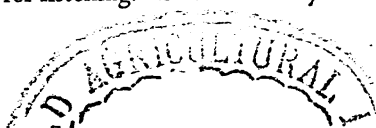
The critics believe there is nothing in what the 'popular preacher' says. (A poor compliment to those who come miles to hear him say it!) Besides, the 'popular preacher' has attained his position in unworthy ways. He has used 'stunts' and 'sensationalism'. He seeks the limelight, courts publicity, stoops to cheap devices to advertise himself, has his eye, not on serving His Master, but in getting a good job. So the critics say!

But if your church is empty you are 'no good'. You are 'dull' and 'stodgy'; you are 'hard to follow', or you 'can't preach for nuts'. If you preach briefly, people 'won't get their money's worth', or they say 'it's hardly worth coming'. If you preach for half-an-hour; they will say you are long-winded and 'don't know when to stop'. If you read your sermon they will wish you 'didn't stick to the manuscript', if you are an extempore preacher they will say you have 'the gift of the gab'. If you lighten your discourse with kindly humour—as Jesus undoubtedly did,—you are 'trying to be funny'. If you don't, you are labelled a 'solemn and pompous ass'. If you discard a 'dog collar' you will be called 'frivolous' or 'ashamed of being a parson'. If you wear it they will say, 'I wonder if he takes it off in his bath'. If you get about amongst folk they will think you don't study enough. If you put in long hours of study they will say they never see you. If you try to be a 'man's man' they will ask you if you've forgotten how much depends on the women of the church. If you pop into the Mothers' Meeting or the Ladies' Working Party, someone will say 'Oh a parson's always "drinking tea with women"'. You must know by instinct when any one is ill and visit him before he is better or he will be aggrieved. If you pray with him he will be embarrassed. If you don't, you 'don't know your job': . . . No, my dear chap, you won't escape criticism. No parson ever does, and his worst critics are jealous members of his own profession. But all is well if you can look Jesus Christ in the face and say to Him, 'You know my strength. You know the hours I have put in. You know what I have tried to do.' The minister is responsible to Christ even more than to his officials, and if you take your programme to Him in the quiet time of devotion before breakfast,

and feel that He smiles upon your schedule, then you will not be depressed by the criticism of dissatisfied officials.

2. Now let me turn to say one thing about the pastoral side of your work. The first qualification of a minister is that he must love people. He must not just take a professional interest in them. That is not enough. I am so glad that you really do love people. In a moment they can tell the difference between the man who is taking an interest in them because it is his duty to do so, and the man who really cares about their troubles and sorrows, their sicknesses of mind and body, and the distress and worry that they bear. People, of course, will often take advantage of a man's real love for them, and sometimes they will worry you with things that you think are trifling. But if they are not trifling to them, they must not be trifling to you until you have been able to persuade them also that they are trifling. You are the kind of sensitive person who will give love and affection freely. I need not warn you that, although to give love means to get love, to love people until their troubles hurt you is a very costly and exhausting business. But that is what we are ordained to do. The words 'vicar' and 'curate' are not used in Free Church denominations, but they express truths about the ministry that we cannot ignore. The real 'vicar' suffers vicariously for others, and in a real sense he is the vicar or *deputy* of Christ. The 'curate' is the man who cares and the man who takes care of others. He is their curator and he is the one who cures them. All the words have the same root.

I specially want to ask you in your pastoral work to try to be available to people. You may have to restrict this to certain hours, and you may have often to escape from the scene of action in order to keep your own soul alive. Don't let that dismay you, for Christ did the same and went away into the mountains where nobody could get at Him. But do let it be known that you are available at certain hours. So many people who consult me tell me that their minister is too busy, or that he would not understand, or that he would be shocked. The ideal minister mapping out his week's work must leave some hours for listening. If he is too busy



to listen, he is too busy with the wrong things. If he cannot understand people's troubles, there is something radically wrong with his training and his knowledge of men, and if he is shocked, it proves he is unadjusted to life himself. Jesus was purer than any of us, but He was never shocked. To be shocked means that you are pretending that life is what it is not and that you are horrified by the truth. To show that you are shocked at anybody's story may effectually seal people's lips and drive them in on themselves, at a time when their confession would have spelt healing. Remember that our people should have at our hands everything that is of value in the Roman Catholic Confessional. Your people ought to be able to come to you, feel that they can pour out all that is on their heart and mind, certain that you will not repeat a word of it, *not even to your own wife*, and that you will be able to give them the kind of sympathy that heals without encouraging self-pity, and the kind of guidance which will enable them to find God's path through the tangled undergrowth of the forest of their troubles.

You know how interested I have been for twenty-five years in the value which psychological knowledge and insight have for our work. Into that I will not now enter. We have discussed it together many times. But do offer to people a ministry of listening. There is healing for a great number of people in just sharing with their minister the heavy burdens that weigh them down.

I know the importance of visiting people in their own homes. Frankly, it is not practicable for me to do much of that now. I have first-rate assistance in that matter and, as you know, my people are so widely scattered. They all come an average of ten miles and, in the old City Temple, a mathematician once remarked that the journeys made on any one Sunday morning, if added together, would exceed a journey round the world! But visiting should be done if possible for it is an important part of ministerial work. We ought to know the background of our people. We ought to know their children, the job the husband does, the circumstances in which his wife works, and, having made contact in carefree days by a pastoral visit, we make it easier for our people to come to us in the day of trouble. But if ever you have to decide whether it is

more important to visit or to let people come to consult you, I myself am of the opinion that the latter is more important. 'Go not to those who need you,' said John Wesley, 'but to those who need you most', and those who come to see you prove their need by their journey. I have frequently seen six or seven people in a day, where it would have been impossible, for geographical reasons alone, to visit that number. Some, of course, have to be visited—the sick and especially those in hospital. Recently in a single day I visited a man stricken down with mental illness, a patient seriously ill in hospital, a man with cancer sent home to die, a doctor stricken with paralysis, a boy who had just come out of prison after serving a two years' sentence, and a woman whose only son had been killed in the Air Force. I can only say to you, Ronald, how glad I am that in your wife-to-be you have one who, after such a day as that, with its emotional and intellectual demands, will be able to receive you and give you refreshment, not only of body, but of spirit, by her joyous companionship and the serenity and peace of a Christian home.

3. In regard to your preaching, I would like one message to stand out. You MUST get your message across. Take pains to do that. I feel old enough now to talk to you from a pretty long experience. I have myself written sermons out five or six times, and then preached them, and then gone home and written them out again because I felt that the matter could be put even more clearly without any possible chance of ambiguity or misunderstanding. Let me say that over to you once more. You simply MUST get your message across to people. Remember that the people who come to listen to a sermon are, in the main, people who want to be helped in the task of living. I know that the intellectual standard is much higher than it used to be. But, at the same time, in these days people's minds are very tired. You must work hard beforehand to be simple when you preach. People will not make the intellectual effort to follow an argument that is vague and diffuse and unrelated to life. I suppose it is consoling to some men to have the reputation of being clever preachers, but it is of no value



to be very clever if one is incomprehensible. My own ambition is so to preach that everybody in the congregation over fifteen years of age and of average intellect shall be able, not only to understand what I am talking about, but to receive my message. Remember that Jesus's words were so profound that we have been discussing them for two thousand years, and yet, although people were often puzzled, nobody seems to have gone home and said: 'Well, I expect He is a very clever preacher, but it was all over my head and I couldn't understand what He was talking about.' 'The common people heard Him gladly!' And He was such an artist in illustrations—one of the most important parts of our craft—that when He told them stories, the stories were like caskets of lovely jewels. His hearers did not understand everything that was said at the time, but truth was put into a casket that they could carry home, and when they came to think things over and talk them over in the bazaars and the streets, in workshops and in tiny homes, they could take the jewels out and look at them, hold them up to the light and rejoice in their beauty and appreciate their value. Only so could His message be received by simple people and be handed on to us unspoiled by the minds through which the message passed.

Make sure also that your message touches life at the points at which your hearers touch it. So many people complain that sermons are irrelevant, that they are no help because the preacher does not seem to understand what his hearers have to face. I hope your people will not go away rejoicing in your brilliance or praising the sermon, but that they will go away praising God for a message that has given them power to live, and that shows them that their lives, even theirs, can become beautiful and meaningful and purposeful because God loves them and can weave their activities—both joyous and sorrowful—into His plan.

I would like also to say this to you. Remember that in every congregation there is generally at least one broken heart. Try to remember, when you are preaching and offering prayers for others—a terribly responsible thing to do and one to which we should give a great deal of careful preparation and forethought—that there is almost always present at least one who is unhappy and troubled

and distressed, though it may be with a secret problem closely guarded and never confided to another.

I want to suggest that you should never preach for more than four Sundays without exchanging pulpits with another minister. I don't know any one amongst my friends in our profession who can remain fresh after preaching eight sermons running. You get stale and need a break in order to climb to the mountain-tops and take deep breaths of mountain air. Your people will have the refreshment of hearing someone with a different point of view, and you will come back feeling refreshed and renewed by the breaking of the strain—and it is a very considerable one—of providing two living and vital messages every Sunday. Don't let your people bully you into going on and on, until you become stale and dull.

Then, you will never forget what you yourself have so beautifully said to-day, that the goal of all preaching is to bring men and women into living touch with Christ. If they forget the sermon and make no comment on it, but are left at the end of the service on their knees, looking up into His face and vowing to begin all over again with Him, then that is the grandest end of any service.

Let me conclude the address by underlining the three points I have made—one about your private life, one about your pastoral work, and the third about your preaching work—by reminding you that Jesus Christ will confront you at all those three points.

He will confront you in your private devotional life. You cannot go on for long calling people continually to a higher way of life if you are failing in your own private devotional life to keep tryst with God in the solitary place. You can often help people to get farther than you have ever got yourself. It is false to suppose that we cannot take people farther than we have reached ourselves. Many people that I have been allowed to help are now much finer Christians than I, but I am quite sure that it is impossible to do our work in sincerity and truth if once our devotional discipline is allowed to become a farce or a fiction.

He will confront you in your pastoral work. From the eyes of

harassed men and women who seek your help He will plead with you. You will often become very tired and wish they would go home and not trouble you. You may be tempted to say, 'What are your troubles to do with me?' If your experience is like mine, scores of people who are nothing to do with your church, and often nothing to do with any church, and sometimes have no real concern about their souls, and don't pretend that they have any intention of following Christ, will ask for your help, and, indeed, act as though they had the right to make a demand on your time and strength. But remember that if you turn them away, you may be hindering Christ's own purposes. You might even be making one of the 'little ones' to stumble. I have often felt so tired that I have been within an inch of refusing to see a man or a woman, and then some glance in their eyes has somehow seemed to me to be the hunger of His own heart, shining in the eyes of those He loves even if they don't love Him, and I have been rebuked and challenged to help.

He will confront you as you go up the pulpit steps to preach. Dr. Gossip used to say something like this: 'It is as though He is at the top of the pulpit stairs and you have to pass Him. If you have been wasting your time during the week, you won't dare to look into His face and you can be pretty certain of having a bad time in the pulpit. But if you have been busy about His business, even if your preparation has not been all you would have liked, but if you can say to Him, 'You understand all that has happened this past week, and you know that I have done my best', then Christ can use the poorest sermon if the sincerity of the preacher is behind it.

One thing, my dear fellow, you cannot do. You cannot escape Him. He is infinite Love, but His demands are inexorable. He gives Himself to us utterly, but He demands the uttermost from us. He is tender in the hour of our need and 'the bruised reed He does not break', but if through carelessness, or slackness, or indifference, or selfishness, we injure 'the little ones', 'His eyes are as a flame of fire and out of His mouth proceedeth a sharp two-edged sword'.

At all three points—your private life, your pastoral work, your public utterances—He will confront you, and I can tell you it is a hell of a life to be a minister unless you are in the right relationship with Him.

But let my last word be of comfort. He will be with you all the time. You won't be alone. In every situation you have to meet, remember that He will be there before you are. One of the hardest tasks we have to do is to visit the home upon which sorrow, calamity, or death has fallen. But as you make your way along the streets to the home overshadowed by grief, remember that He is there before you get there. And in all the difficulties that will meet you and which make the minister's life a fascination and a joy, but sometimes also a very heavy burden, the only way you will be able to go on at all will be by remembering that the work to which you have been ordained to-day is not your work. You are not even called upon to do His work. *He is doing His work through you.* What is required of you is not even that you become successful. 'It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.' It doesn't say 'successful'.

So go out, my dear Ronald, with your loved one at your side, into the most glorious work which man is ever allowed to do, the glad, holy, inexorable service of the Most High God. May God daily bless you both until your work for Him is ended and you see Him, face to face.

## QUESTIONARY

### CHAPTER I

#### *The Significance of Silence*

1. What would you say to a man who said that silent meditation amid the beauties of nature was all he needed in the way of religion?
2. Imagine yourself going to a home stricken with grief because the only son had been killed. You desire to comfort the bereaved. What would you do?
3. Is there such a thing as the sin of breathlessness?

### CHAPTER II

#### *Youth Looks at Christ*

1. Estimate modern youth's attitude to Christianity. What does youth desire to see that now is lacking in the Church of Christ?
2. Why does Jesus appeal to youth and yet the Churches often alienate youth?
3. Under what circumstances would Jesus condemn another? Some say, 'Jesus loved sinners more than religious people'. What do you think?
4. Does belief in the divinity of Christ matter?

### CHAPTER III

#### *Is it Really Good to be Alive?*

1. 'The good things of life don't make good people.' Discuss this. Ought we not, then, to want them, or provide them for our dear ones?

2. We say that God doesn't will our suffering, He wills our health. Yet we say that He puts us in a world where suffering is probable. Doesn't that come to the same thing as willing our suffering?
3. Is a man or woman ever made a saint by a life of happiness unbroken by suffering?
4. Why restrain evil in ourselves or the world if God can use it for His purposes?

## CHAPTER IV

*The Lonely Greatness of the World*

1. Read some hymns in which pity is used in making the evangelical appeal (e.g. M.H.B. 150, 330, 331, 332, 334; C.H.B. 340, 348, 419, 486). Is this sound, or does it put the emphasis in the wrong place?
2. How would you deal with the pathetic victim of self-pity?
3. The Rev. Jabez Stone comes to you for sympathy and says he is lonely. He recites the unkind things others have said of him. How would you help him if you thought the things he complained of were true?
4. 'There are some things God can't say to us until we come away from those who admire us.' Do you agree? What things?

## CHAPTER V

*Thou shalt Love Thy Neighbour*

1. Mrs. Jones is a 'big Methodist' who lives next door to a woman who deals in the black market, wangles more than her share of rations, secretes coal when the law prohibits it and no one else has enough, lights a bonfire when Mrs. Jones's washing is put out, and encourages her dog and cat to use the Joneses' garden as a playground. How should Mrs. Jones proceed to love her neighbour?

2. What is the Christian attitude to a person one doesn't like—avoidance, cultivation, doing good . . . ?
3. Differentiate between 'telling Mr. X off' and 'speaking the truth in love'.

## CHAPTER VI

*Thou shalt Love Thine Enemy*

1. Does God love Hitler? Do you?
2. Does God love St. Paul more than He loves Hitler?
3. If you heard that your private 'enemy' had met with some misfortune, e.g. cancer, or losing a dear one, would you be sorry or glad? Be honest!
4. If a certain course of action is 'wrong' in the individual, can it possibly be 'right' for the State?

## CHAPTER VII

*Thou shalt Love Thy God*

1. The Rev. Enoch Wilkinson told his people in a sermon that they *ought* to love God. Walk home imaginatively with Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, who, with you, heard the sermon, and comment on it, remembering that the Jenkinsons have lost their son, their home, and their business in the war.
2. When Miss Tomkins went to a psycho-analyst, he told her all her troubles were due to the fact that she hated her mother and wouldn't admit it. Miss Tomkins is a Christian. What should she do?
3. Can a person love God with his mind, and at the same time recite a creed or sing a psalm, making meanwhile private interpretations and mental reservations about the meanings of the words used, i.e. using words in a sense other than that of their face value?

## CHAPTER VIII

*On having a Right Sense of Values*

1. Is 'happiness' a true value?
2. Has the Church got its sense of values right? Consider the preoccupation of raising money, the interest in people of high position, the rarity of conversion in the light of Wesley's dictum to his preachers: 'You have nothing to do but save souls; therefore, spend and be spent in this endeavour.'
3. What is to be gained by having a right sense of values?

## CHAPTER IX

*Why People don't go to Church*

1. 'I'm as good as many who go to Church', says Mr. Superior Pagan. He is too. Have you a reply?
2. Frame a definition of hypocrisy, remembering that we can all be consistent if we scale down our ideals.
3. Mr. Johnson says he used to go to Church, but an official in it ran away with his typist. What would you say? Is your church the kind of place you feel confident in inviting Mr. Johnson to join? If not, what are you going to do about it?

## CHAPTER X

*Why People do go to Church*

1. The Churches for hundreds of years have mediated the Christian religion in practically the same way. Modern worship is poorly attended. Diagnose this situation. What is wrong? What do people (a) want and (b) need? Should we trouble about what they want? Should we only concern ourselves with what we feel they need? Or should we offer them (a) in such a way as to include (b)? If so, how?



2. Should the old-fashioned sense of sin be emphasized to-day?
3. Jesus went to church. Name all the reasons you can think of, and say which of them apply to us.

## CHAPTER XI

*Why should I read the Bible?*

1. Milly West has been brought up in a strict and, perhaps, narrow religious home. She said: 'I know it's true, because it's in the Bible.' What comment would you make?
2. 'Everything is false about God in the Old Testament that is not in harmony with the picture of God in the New.' Discuss this statement.
3. What is the difference in the inspiration of Shelley, of David the Psalmist, and of St. Paul?

## CHAPTER XII

*How should I read the Bible?*

1. 'Don't let isolated texts loom too large. Make your mental picture of Jesus from the four Gospels and leave isolated texts for further inquiry if they seem hard to fit into the whole picture.' Discuss this.
2. Get a member of the Group to prepare a 'picture' of an incident in the life of Jesus in the spirit of Ruskin's words quoted on p. 141.
3. Would you advise a young Christian to read the Bible or a devotional book? Mr. Parker says that he reads six verses every night. What would you say to him?

## CHAPTER XIII

*The Secret Ministries of God*

1. Have you any advice for a person whose mind, last thing at night, fills with unclean pictures and lustful phantasies

2. Which is the more important function of the memory, to help us remember or to forget?
3. In friendship, at unconscious levels, one nature actually feeds on another. Without words, often, strength passes. Discuss, in the light of this truth, the words of Jesus about the Bread of Life (John vi. 35) and the meaning of Holy Communion.

## CHAPTER XIV

*The God of Detail*

1. 'When a king stoops to pick up a trifle, it is a trifle no longer.' Discuss this in the light of the chapter.
2. Which do you think is the more valuable asset to a State, a battleship or a little boy saying his prayers?
3. Does God really know in detail the things, which even we call unimportant, that happen to everybody in the world, e.g. that Hu Sin Yam, aged ten, in a village near Pekin, has a cat that has just had four kittens and that one of them is ginger?

## CHAPTER XV

*God's Intolerable Compliment*

1. Mr. Horace Flannagan says: 'If I had been God, I would have made everybody happy.' Is there anything wrong here? If not, why not? Don't you want to be happy?
2. Would it be better all round if we only suffered for our own sins, mistakes, and ignorance, instead of suffering for those of others as well? Why?
3. 'Kindness is often a love substitute which we offer to people whom we may not love, cannot love, or cannot be bothered to love.' Discuss this. What is the difference between kindness and love and their effects?

## CHAPTER XVI

*Time, the Deceiver*

1. Many people fear death. Can you help them towards accepting the New Testament attitude to death instead of that of the Old? What is generally the difficulty?
2. What do you mean by 'eternal life'?
3. 'You will get over it in time.' Is there anything wrong with that statement in reference to:
  - (a) Sin.
  - (b) Fear.
  - (c) Frustration?
4. Which is the Christian duty, to wear out at forty or rust out at eighty?

## CHAPTER XVII

*The Day of the Lord*

1. 'When we think about God, we cannot, if we think truly, wish better than the truth.' Discuss this statement. Is it true?
2. Does God ever 'intervene' in history, or do the factors within the situation work out in ways that accomplish His will?
3. Do you believe in the 'Second Coming of Christ'? What exactly do you believe?

## CHAPTER XVIII

*Resting in God's Infinity*

1. 'The poet can say "O Wind", with more meaning than we put into the words, "O God".' Discuss this. Is God too small and petty as we conceive Him, and is this why organized Christianity seems to attract so many cranks, faddists, and fools? Why do the men of big chest and big outlook seem to avoid Churches? Or, as someone put it, 'Why aren't all the best chaps Christians?'

2. 'It was a mere chance.' Discuss this statement in the light of the chapter.
3. State a problem which is only made more difficult by thinking of God as a Father. Where then *can* the mind find rest?

CHAPTER XIX

*A Message to the Spiritually Discouraged*

1. Christianity says, 'Let Christ control your life and believe in Him'. Psychology says, 'Change your picture of yourself and believe in yourself'. Which will bring the best results? Why?
2. What is the Christian answer to those who are hungry for love and appreciation? Is it *really* satisfying?
3. Is sympathy bad for folk or good for them? So what?

CHAPTER XX

*To Thine Own Self be True*

1. Hitler used to say he followed his 'intuitions'. He may have supposed he was being true to himself. Can we check an intuition? How?
2. Why didn't Jesus withdraw when danger grew imminent and live to a ripe old age, preaching and teaching and healing for another twenty years? Might He not have done more good?
3. Make a list of the different selves in your personality. Which is the real self?

CHAPTER XXI

*As a Tale that is Told*

1. Examine the chain of sentences on p. 237. Is it weak at any point? If so, where and why?
2. What is the attitude of the Church to social reform?
3. What exactly is meant by a 'satisfying end' (p. 242)? Are there not many great stories with an unsatisfying end? May not personal life and human history be in this category?

## CHAPTER XXII

*Inevitable Mystery*

1. Is mystery in religion a disadvantage?
2. 'All will be made plain at last.' Will it? Should we have to be equal with God to understand all? So what?
3. Elaborate the difference between knowing a lot about God and knowing God.

## CHAPTER XXIII

*The City Temple at Worship*

1. Criticize the Order of Worship used at the City Temple and suggest improvements.
2. Which is the most important thing in a service?
3. Ought we to try to attract people to come to Church Services? Where must we draw the line?

## CHAPTER XXIV

*The City Temple of To-morrow*

1. What activities should be included in the work of the modern Church?
2. Discuss the place of ritual in Free Church worship.
3. If we succeed in attracting the outsider into our church, are we content with what we have to offer him when he does come? So what?

## CHAPTER XXV

*An Ordination Charge*

1. For a minister to do all the things that fall within his sphere is impossible. What, in your judgement, are the most important things he should do?
2. Is the day of the sermon over? So what?
3. Why don't young men enter the ministry in greater numbers?

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